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Error in Shakespeare: Shakespeare in Error

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Declaration

Chapter two, ‘Error and the Other Tongue’, has been previously published in a slightly altered form as “‘Enfranchised” Language in *Henry V* and *The Dutch Courtesan*’, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, Vol. 84, Autumn 2013, pp. 1-11.

I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university and that it is my own work.

Abstract

Error is significant for Shakespeare because of its multiple, flexible meanings and its usefulness in his drama. In the early modern period it meant not only a ‘fault’ or ‘mistake’, but ‘wandering’. ‘Wandering’, through its conceptual relation with metaphor, plot and other devices, aligns error much more with the literary, which dilutes the negative connotations of mistake, and consequently error has the potential to become valuable rather than something to be corrected. Shakespeare’s drama constantly digresses and is full of complex characters who control and are controlled by error. Error is an ambiguous concept that enables language and action to become copious: figurative language becomes increasingly abstracted and wanders away from its point, or the number of errors a character encounters increases, as in *The Comedy of Errors*.

The first chapter argues that error is problematically gendered, that women’s language is often represented as being in error despite being the defenders of the ‘mother tongue’, the guardians of the vernacular. The containment of women in this paradox is necessary for a sense of national identity, that women must pass on the unifying English. The second chapter argues that foreign language becomes English error on the early-modern stage. Shakespeare subverts this tendency, inviting in foreign language for the benefit of the play and, in the context of the history play, of the body politic. The third chapter argues that in *The Comedy of Errors*, textual indeterminacy and error increases the thematic error of the confusion of the twins. Error is not something to correct automatically without altering the meaning of the play. The fourth chapter argues that the setting of the wood and its wandering characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* licenses the error of figurative language that wanders away from straightforward speech. The fifth chapter argues that the expansive category of genre falls into error in *Cymbeline*. The genre turns irrevocably from romance to a satire of James VI and I’s vision of the union.

What emerges from the analysis of these permutations of error is that, in Shakespeare’s hands, error is not just a literary device. Error is valuable linguistically, dramatically, politically and textually; in order to understand it, we must resist the ideology of standardisation that privileges what is ‘good’ and ‘correct’. Attending to Shakespearean error demonstrates the need to think beyond the paradigm of the right, and attend to the political implications of ‘wrongness’ and its creative literary employment.

Introduction

0.1 Thesis Summary

Error is significant for Shakespeare because of its multiple, flexible meanings and its usefulness in his drama. In the early modern period the word meant not only a ‘fault’ or ‘mistake’, but ‘wandering’. ‘Wandering’, through its conceptual relation with metaphor, plot and other devices, aligns error with literary creativity; this association has the potential to dilute the negative connotations of mistake. Consequently error might become valuable rather than something to be corrected. Shakespeare’s drama constantly digresses and is full of complex characters who attempt to control and are controlled by error. This drama is also linguistically experimental, exploiting figurative language, which in itself is a type of digression or error. Shakespeare’s use of figurative language exists in a context of ideas about propriety and decorum, as I will discuss. Some early modern authors protested against figuration that they deemed ‘excessive’.¹ In this context, Shakespeare’s figuration is language in error. Yet he demonstrably does not find fault with such stylistics; for him, error or deviation is germane to poetic language.²

This thesis focuses on a group of early Shakespearean comedies and histories from the late sixteenth century. At this time the vernacular was rapidly expanding and Shakespeare was profiting from this instability by experimenting with language while questioning the concept of the nation and its relation to the vernacular. The

¹ This is discussed in more detail at 0.2.2. These Renaissance ideas originate in Quintilian: ‘While moderate and timely use of Metaphor brightens our style, frequent use of it leads to obscurity and tedium, while its continuous application ends up as Allegory and Enigma.’ Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), bk.8 ch.6, p. 433. For a discussion of figuration as a ‘vice of style’, see William Poole, ‘The Vices of Style’ *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, eds. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 237-51.

² As Derek Attridge argues in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988), discussed below at 0.2.1 ‘Error as Wandering’.

plays in question are as follows: *3 Henry VI* (1590-1), *The Comedy of Errors* (1592-4), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597), *2 Henry IV* (1598), *Henry V* (1599). Focus on Shakespeare is contextualised with reference to *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605) and 'The Faerie Queene' (1590), alongside non-fictional works such as Richard Mulcaster's *Elementarie* (1582), George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589), Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* (1595) and other texts on the theory of language published at the end of the sixteenth century.³ The final chapter is a divergence to late Shakespeare with *Cymbeline* (1609-10), exploring the mixing of genre and its relation to error.

I mainly examine error in the context of comedy or comic moments. We speak of tragic *error* but of comic *errors*: errors in comedy are plural and have less consequence; they resist the predetermining pattern in which a slip or accident could set in motion a chain of events that inexorably leads to a character's death. In the universe of the comedies, causality is less potent or destructive and error becomes useful in creating playful multiplicity and ambiguity in Shakespeare's poetic drama. This is not to claim that Shakespearean tragedy is devoid of playful digression – the tragedies are peppered with moments of levity and fooling – but the trajectory of comedy is better able to licence error without consequence. This invitation to experimentation that comedy presents is exploited by the comedies and comic moments from the histories composed at the end of the sixteenth century.

The first section is entitled 'Erroneous Vessels: Gender, Language and Error'. 'Erroneous vessels' is my pun of 'erroneous vassals' from *Richard III* (1592-3), a misreading which draws attention to the nurturing and servile properties of women as

³ Other texts include: Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1570) at EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2014]; John Florio, *His First Fruits*, (1578) at EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2014]; Angel Day, *The English secretorie* (London, 1586) at EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2014]; Abraham Fraunce, *The Lawyers Logicke* (1588, rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1969).

developed in chapter one.⁴ This section is concerned with the multifarious ways in which error is gendered. The first chapter argues that women's language is often represented as error despite women being the defenders of the 'mother tongue', the guardians of the vernacular. Error is used to disempower women as the bearers of the national language. The image of the 'mother tongue' naturalises women in this position of both power and mistake. I examine the mother tongue in terms of national identity, as women must pass on the national language, the unifying English. The second chapter argues that foreign language becomes English error on the early-modern stage. Shakespeare subverts this by using foreign language for comic purposes rather than banishing it. Inclusion of linguistic foreign error provides a more general model for cultural inclusion rather than xenophobic exclusion in his representation of foreignness.

The second section, 'Getting Lost', focuses on the vagrancies of error, its early modern meaning as wandering and divergence. The third chapter argues that in *The Comedy of Errors*, textual indeterminacy and error catalyses the thematic error of the confusion of the twins. Editorial sensitivity to textual error becomes crucial: it is not necessarily something to correct as this alters the meaning of the play and its sense of error. The fourth chapter argues that the setting of the wood and its wandering characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6) licenses the error of figurative language that wanders away from straightforward speech. Metaphor is not merely a linguistic feature but becomes an organising principle, through the translations and transformations in the fairy wood. I term this 'the methodology of metaphor', whereby structural comparisons can be drawn between the components of metaphor and both themes and structures within the play.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (I.4.195), ed. G. Blakemore Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

Larger categories as well as local details are subject to Shakespearean error. Just as the methodology of metaphor is an organising principle marked by error, the broader category of Shakespeare's genre is faulty. The final section, 'Category Error', argues that genre falls into error in *Cymbeline* (1609-10), as the genre turns irrevocably away from romance into a different mode. Shakespeare disregards the generic expectations of romance by concluding the play with a political allegory, which can be read as a satirical statement about James VI and I's vision of the union of Britain. In *Cymbeline*, the consequences of error are profound as the play delivers us into a different world, its ending very different from its beginning. Towards the end of his career, Shakespeare embraced the potentialities of error to their full, resulting in the fragmentation of the literary form; his use of genre is itself in error, since it has fully digressed from one genre to another. *Cymbeline*, in the end, fails to deliver a satisfactory or even coherent ending because it resists the expectations of romance.

0.1.1 The Changing State of the English Language

Shakespeare's use of error in his digressive linguistic invention, especially his figurative language, strays beyond decorum. This is partly enabled by the historical context of the English language at the end of the sixteenth century. The protean nature of the vernacular has been recognised by Paula Blank, who says '[i]n an era in which the meaning of "English" was still in flux, there was a widespread, intoxicating sense that the vernacular was up for grabs, its forms plastic enough to respond to the dictates and whims of individual proponents for change'.⁵ The absence of a monolingual vernacular dictionary had implications for the meaning,

⁵ Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 29.

spelling, pronunciation and etymology of words that were without consensus or standardisation.⁶ The degree of variance in the lexicon can only be estimated, and even after dictionaries were introduced the elasticity of the language did not disappear. Even now, when a greater standardisation has been achieved partly by the availability of dictionaries, it does not follow that inconsistency is eradicated or that there is full consensus on definition and use. Language innovates to stay alive and express our new experiences, especially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; as Richard Mulcaster says, ‘new occasions brede new words’.⁷

In 1476 the printing press was introduced and with it came the issue of which variety of English of the many should be propagated in print.⁸ Roger Lass argues that in early modern English there was a ‘growing perception of standardness as a virtue’ which would ‘give to the increasingly used local vernaculars an “authority” and permanence like that of Latin’.⁹ Despite this, early modern English remained non-standard, not yet able to fulfil the prescription of ‘correct usage’.¹⁰ Manfred Görlach recognises that if we can conceive of standardised early modern English, it can only

⁶ The title of the first English ‘dictionary’ in 1604 is misleading. Robert Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabetical* (1604) is a ‘wordbook’. Its purpose was not to standardise the language by defining it, but rather to enable the uneducated to understand the ‘inkhorn’ terms they may encounter. This ‘dictionary’ does not conform to modern ideals of lexicography – to a comprehensively defined language – but only focuses on certain words from Greek, Latin and French that prove problematic for the ‘unskilled’. It is the beginning of a move to define words but does not mark the beginning of linguistic uniformity. See Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical* (London: 1604), at *Early English Books Online* (henceforth *EEBO*) at <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 April 2014].

⁷ Richard Mulcaster, *Elementarie*, ed., E.T. Campagnac (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 138. Margaret Ferguson argues that ‘the idea of a uniform national language has a long and socially fraught history that, when studied, invites us to complicate our ideas about what it means to be literate in one’s national language.’ Margaret Ferguson, *Dido’s Daughters: Literacy, Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁸ Because of the printing press’s reproductive abilities, metaphors of birth, generation and breeding were used to express this manner of increase in early modern England. See Brooks, Douglas A. ed., *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁹ Roger Lass, ‘Introduction’ in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed, Roger Lass, Vol. 3 1476-1776, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 8. On the non-standardised early modern English, see Manfred Görlach, *Introduction to Early Modern English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); N. F. Blake, *A History of the English Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), especially, pp. 172-235; Laura Wright, ed., *The Development of Standard English 1300-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ See Terttu Nevalainen, *An Introduction to Early Modern English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 7-9.

be tentatively: the ‘emerging standard [...] took the first step in the history of the English Language towards creating some kind of recognizable and mandatory order out of the chaos’.¹¹ Lass emphasises the difference of English from its European neighbours, stating ‘[i]n other countries academies were established to produce dictionaries and grammars (Italy in 1582, France in 1635), but the anarchic and independent English never got quite that far.’¹² It seems that the standardisation of early modern English was still something to be hoped for rather than practised.¹³ This provided Shakespeare with a protean, flexible medium that lends itself to linguistic experimentation such as inventing word meaning, borrowing foreign words, transporting words into different contexts, and playing with the possibilities of ambiguity.¹⁴

Mulcaster notes the malleability of the language, where new words were being coined to cope with the demands of expression. He claims that ‘[t]he number of things, whereof we write and speak is infinite, the words wherewith we write and speak, be definite and within number. Whereupon we are driven to use one, and the

¹¹ Lass, ‘Introduction’ p. 8.

¹² Lass, ‘Introduction’ p. 8. François Rigolot argues that the flexibility of the language inevitably led to error: ‘A une époque où le vernaculaire rivalise non seulement avec le latin mais avec divers dialectes et patois dans la vie quotidienne, les erreurs de langage peuvent entraîner nombre de malentendus.’ My translation: ‘In a time when the vernacular competed not only with Latin but with various dialects and patois in daily life, the errors of language could bring about many misunderstandings.’ Rigolot, *L’Erreur de la Renaissance* (Paris: Champions, 2002), p. 10.

¹³ Görlach argues on the contrary that relative to Middle English, in the fifteenth century English began to appear standardised as linguistic norms for written English began to establish themselves. This was a consequence of English being adopted as the language of the court in 1430 and the introduction of the printing press in 1476. See Manfred Görlach, ‘Regional and Social Variation’, *The Cambridge History of the English Language Volume 3: 1476–1776*, 459–538, especially pp. 459–60.

¹⁴ The perception of Shakespeare’s linguistic creativity led the *OED* to attribute a large number of ‘first recorded uses’ to him, suggesting he was a prolific inventor of words. Subsequently, the reliability of the *OED* and its dating system has been challenged. See: Jürgen Schäfer, *Documentation in the OED: Shakespeare and Nashe as Test Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); W. S. McKie, ‘Shakespeare’s English: and How Far it Can be Investigated with the Help of the “New English Dictionary”’, *Modern Language Review*, 1936, 31, 1–10; Ward E. Y. Elliot and Robert J. Valenza, ‘Shakespeare’s Vocabulary: Did it Dwarf All Others?’ in *Stylistics and Shakespeare’s Language*, ed. Mireille Ravassat and Jonathan Culpeper (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 34–57. Despite the biases that feed ‘bardolatry’, Shakespeare was undoubtedly inventive with a malleable language. Both Shakespeare’s neologisms and creative ‘productivity’ are due, in part, to the intermediary status of the evolving English vernacular.

same word in very many, nay, sometimes in very contrary senses.’¹⁵ This conveys a sense of the incompleteness of language, where it must adopt and assimilate words if it is to keep pace. Shakespeare takes advantage of this sense of openness in his own language use, discussed below in his use of figurative language (0.2.2), and with foreign linguistic borrowing, examined in chapter two. According to the precepts of Renaissance rhetoric and rules of decorum, this renders Shakespeare’s language use erroneous. His language is also ‘mistaken’ according to some early modern writers who argued that the vernacular should not borrow terms from foreign language in order to improve its expression because it dilutes the ‘purity’ of the English.¹⁶ We can sense a tension between Shakespeare’s use of error within an already flexible, expanding language, and those who were beginning to attempt to categorise and eradicate such ‘errors’ through the application of rules and standards.

0.2 Varieties of Error

0.2.1 *Error as Wandering*

Shakespeare’s use of error is productive: it is not something to be corrected or eradicated but is rather a complex and ambiguous concept that can be put to use in creating drama. In the early modern period it meant not only a ‘fault’, ‘offense’ or ‘mistake’, but also ‘wandering’.¹⁷ ‘Wandering’ is a significant concept for this thesis because it stretches the meaning of ‘error’. Error as wandering is coherent with errancy and itineracy, which originates with the travelling knight-errant of medieval

¹⁵ Mulcaster, *Elementarie*, p. 92.

¹⁶ For discussion of this see 1.1.1.

¹⁷ On seeing his lost son for the first time, Egeon exclaims ‘Unless the fear of death doth make me dote, | I see my son Antipholus’ (V.1.195-6). ‘Dote’ is an interesting word here, meaning to act or talk foolishly. Egeon is referring to his possible error in seeing his son before him but Shakespeare describes the nature of the potential mistake as being out of his wits rather than erring or wandering. At times when error as mistake needs to be signified, a variety of language can be used.

romance.¹⁸ This dilutes the negative connotations of mistake, and consequently has the potential to become valuable. The literary error, the digression, tempers ‘error’ as a moral category. In 1587, Thomas Thomas defined ‘error’ as ‘a false opinion, a taking of a falsehood for truth: a wandring, a mistaking, deceit, ignorance: a winding or turning: a turning out of the way.’¹⁹ It is at once a ‘mistake’ and a ‘winding’. Similarly, in 1584, Thomas Cooper conveys its dual sense: it is ‘a false opinion: a taking of falsehoode for truth: a wandring.’²⁰ Wandering is the root of error from the Latin *errare* but its association with falsity is now the primary meaning, obscuring the secondary but equally valid sense, especially in the early modern period. Error is thus a divergence from the straight path, a deviation from the line, and can be conceived in various ways.

In his theory of ‘*délire*’, which is taken up in chapter three, Jean-Jacques Lecercle draws on this etymology of wandering as representing divergence from the line.²¹ The line is normative, defining alternative paths as divergent, and represents a commonsense or *straightforward* standard. The line is pre-determined as ‘correct’, in contrast to error which is a falling off. ‘Correct’ derives from *regere*, meaning to lead straight. The wider discourse of error, then, possesses itself of metaphors of straightness and deviation, and so of good and bad. *Délire* originally meant to go astray, go wrong, or to err. It comes from *delirare*, to be deranged, originally to go off the ‘*lira*’, to go out of the furrow, which is the trench made in the earth by a plough.²² Interestingly, in the etymology of the word the deviation is not defined in

¹⁸ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984); Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993); Isabel Davis, *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1587), sig. xiii r. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 13 November 2014].

²⁰ Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1584), sig. V.v.2 r. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 13 November 2014].

²¹ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass* (Illinois: Open Court, 1985).

²² *OED*, see <www.oed.com> [date accessed 11 November 2014].

terms of a mistake. In the same way that ‘error’ means a divergence from the line rather than just a mistake, ‘délire’ contributes to the discourse that treats error not as mistake but as a discursive and perhaps unexpected variation. Lecercle does not engage with this etymology of délire in his study of the sense in nonsense but his theory can be extended by foregrounding and exploring the constitutive meanings of the word. When the plough falls off the line its efficiency is impinged by straying from the most direct route. Deviation is therefore time-consuming and uncertain as well as non-standard. It cannot be predicted, is difficult or impossible to trace, and lacks clear and logical reasoning.

An example of this kind of aberrance is found in *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-6) in a conversation between Mercutio and Romeo. Their conversation is slippery from the beginning, constantly side-stepping certainty and solidity in favour of puns, alliteration and metaphor. The content of their dialogue turns to analysing their wit, referring to their own fooling: ‘O single-soled jest, solely singular for the singleness!’ (II.4.66). Mercutio asks, ‘Follow me this jest now, till thou has worn out thy pump, that when the single sole of it is worn, the jest may remain, after the wearing, soly singular’ (II.4.61-4). He says that his wit will remain even after the follower has worn out their shoe trying to keep up, leaving his jest ‘singular’. But ‘singular’ also means one, promising that the joke, on its winding passage, will refine the fun of plurality to one: its meaning will become clear.²³ Mercutio, despite being the instigator of this verbal digression, begs for the jest not to be meaningless, ‘Nay, if our wits run the wild-goose chase, I am done’ (II.4.71-2). Language here is not irrelevant or idle; this is the first recorded use of ‘wild-goose chase’, as a metaphor

²³ It can also mean odd or peculiar, suggesting that the joke is slightly perverse in its manner; the discursive manner of the joke is unexpected.

for being led down a hopeless path.²⁴ In the quick linguistic exchange Mercutio responds, ‘Nay, good goose, bite not’, as if the ‘goose’ they were chasing was found and the verbal play is not without meaning (II.4.78).²⁵

Mercutio says, ‘O, here’s a wit of cheverel, that stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad!’ (II.4.83-4). Through this one sentence the language resonates with *Twelfth Night* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.²⁶ Cheverel rhymes with several, for his wit works on more than one level. The use of it here precedes Feste’s perhaps better known reference in *Twelfth Night* (1601-2): ‘A sentence is but a chev’ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn’d outward!’ (III.1.12-3).

‘Chev’ril’ and ‘cheverel’ connote stretchy or pliable and both uses apply to expansive language. Wit for Mercutio stretches ‘from an inch narrow to an ell broad’, an ‘ell’ being a measure of forty five inches. The expansiveness of language is dwelt upon in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1594-5) through the same ‘ell’ or ‘el’ or ‘l’ sound, with Holofernes exploring the dense ‘sore’, a four year old deer, and the significance of the additional ‘l’.

Some say a sore, but not a sore, till now made sore with shooting
The dogs did yell: put *l* to sore, then sorel jumps from thicket,
Or pricket sore, or else sorel; the people fall a-hooting.
If sore be sore, then *L* to sore makes fifty sores o’ sorel:
Of one sore I an hundred make by adding but one more *L*. (IV.2.56-61)

Perhaps at first glance, a pun may seem trivial, but if you ‘follow me this jest’, as Shakespeare asks, it becomes clear that the playful language is not superficial but

²⁴ According to the *OED* this is the first use of this phrase. See <www.oed.com> [date accessed 11 November 2014].

²⁵ ‘Goose’ is also slang for prostitute and Mercutio and Romeo make much of this general meaning of chasing women. But I will just follow the initial, extended metaphor of a digressive, wandering path to meaning.

²⁶ Meaning is being ‘chased’ at speed, it is being pursued as it shifts and turns, passed around in the dialogue between Romeo and Mercutio. Philip Davis refers to this as ‘fast’ language, where the ‘thousands of overlapping possibilities of human meaning offered at the “micro” level cannot hope to be encompassed on a “macro” level’. Philip Davis, *Sudden Shakespeare* (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), p. 3. This may be especially so when the play is being heard for the first time in live performance. Although I have reduced my focus to reading, the likelihood of error, confusion and pleasure may at times be even greater in the context of live or ‘sudden’ performances.

generating connections with language in previous or future lines and even plays. The time-consuming deviation enables productivity of language through playful figuration that feeds on its own energy. These three moments from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Love's Labour's Lost* exemplify productive error.

The notion of wandering is necessary for understanding the nature of metaphor itself. The distinction between 'ordinary' language as clear and distinct, and 'literary' language as unfamiliar and poetic has been frequently asserted by critics since Aristotle.²⁷ Derek Attridge argues that literary language is 'peculiar', or 'strange and novel'.²⁸ He claims that the difference between ordinary and poetic language is often 'treated as a question of *deviation*, on the assumption that there exists a given and stable norm in terms of which literary language, as a subsidiary practice, has to be understood.'²⁹ Poetic language is a deviation and an error in its etymological sense. The poetic wanders away from the norm, occupying a derivative position. Attridge claims that 'the notion of deviation has been frequently used, in some form or other, to fix the potential uncontrollability of literary difference'.³⁰ Deviation both expresses and attempts to control language that is not motivated by straightforward communication.

This concurs with the themes of difference and wandering in *MSND*, where the wood as a place of wandering is a circumscribed location outside of the city walls, as I discuss in chapter four. The wood is a radical and impossible place. Chapter four argues that the language of deviance and difference, the tropes of

²⁷ See Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, esp. pp. 1-16. Also Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: a Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1972); Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸ Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, p. 3.

²⁹ Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, p. 4.

³⁰ Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, p. 5.

metaphor, simile and metalepsis, have a felt impact in the play. They determine both meaning and action, representing the multiform powers of wandering language. A parallel can be drawn between the wood in *MSND* as a subversive space beyond the city of Athens, and the theatres' position in the Liberties, beyond the jurisdiction of London. Steven Mullaney argues that the London theatres had a 'marginal situation' with a 'removed, exterior vantage point', giving them a 'critical perspective on the cultural conditions that made such plays'.³¹ For Mullaney, the theatres' location outside the city in the Liberties of London was 'in a certain sense outside the law, and so could serve as privileged or exempt arenas where the anxieties and insecurities of life in a rigidly organised hierarchical society could be given relatively free reign.'³² The possibility of radical or threatening discourse in this enfranchised space became real, as I argue occurs in the *MSND* wood. This spatial analogue is only strengthened by the drama that occurs within the play, where the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe encourages the wood to be substituted for the theatres in the Liberties.

The deviation from the city to the wood, from the cluster of associations of the city as correct, normal and standard, to the wood as wrong, erratic and subversive, manifests itself in language. Language adopts this wandering, open sense: because the words spoken in *MSND* are located in the margin rather than the centre, forms of signification become 'more contradictory, more extravagant and incontinent, than those allowed to manifest themselves within the city gates'.³³ If we read language by reference to its marginalised place of utterance, the figurative power of metaphor to change and translate meanings has the ability to control plot

³¹ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 9.

³² Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 22.

³³ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 31.

and character, such as when Bottom is turned into a donkey. Thus the metaphor that he is an ass is a trope that works both literally and figuratively. In another act of transformation, the love potion that Puck applies to the eyes of Lysander is the drug of metaphor, the ability to make him magically ‘see’ things in a different way (II.2.78-81).

Linguistic meandering can be identified on a larger scale. The basic structure of the play, at the beginning or end where the setting is being established or closed, is a place from which to digress. For example, Egeon’s imminent death in *The Comedy of Errors* allows him to err into the narrative of the shipwreck and the divided twins, for him to ‘dilate at full’ (I.1.122). Such a plot device initiates the action which then allows divergences to follow. In texts such as *MSND* or *The Comedy of Errors* digression is a central function.

0.2.2 Figurative Language as Error

Tropes are inherently connected with error.³⁴ Peacham defines a trope as ‘an alteration of a word or sentence, from the proper and naturall signification, to an other not proper’.³⁵ The signification made by the trope is ‘improper’, drawing on ideals of decorum to define the trope’s error. Error and figuration are proportional to each other: the more excessive the trope is, the further away it is from its ‘proper’ signification. Tropes, then, are abuses of language, as Puttenham argues:

³⁴ The belief in the Renaissance that metaphor and figures in general are erroneous uses of language can be identified into the twentieth century. Harold Bloom argues that ‘tropes are necessary errors about language, defending ultimately against deadly dangers of literal meaning’. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, first published 1975), p. 94.

³⁵ Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), Sig. Bi.v at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 13 November 2014]. Appropriate language use is linked with property and ownership. Impropriety is when meaning is given to a word which is not the ‘proper’ or literal one; it does not belong. Linguistic decorum is achieved when a word is given the meaning that it owns. Metaphor, then, manages to circumvent semantic ownership, hence its ‘error’. This raises questions about why the relation of words to meaning is represented in terms of ownership rather than, say, association; how a word gains ownership over meaning who has the power to attribute such ownership.

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sort abuses, or rather trespasses, in speech, because they pass the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind, drawing it from plainness and simplicity to a certain doubleness, whereby our talk is guileful and abusing.³⁶

Tropes transgress ‘ordinary’ and ‘common’ language, leading to ambiguity and deception.³⁷ This sense of ‘guileful and abusing’ language, suggests the dangerous consequences of employing tropes, which may both confound communication and mislead it.

The sense not only of failed but dangerous tropic communication is echoed by Henry Peacham in his discussion of metaphor. He claims that certain ‘faults’ should be eradicated from metaphor.

First, that there be not an unlikeness in sted of a likeness...Secondly, that the similitude be not farfetched, as from strange things unknown to the hearer...[for] he shall obscure the thing that would fain make evident. Thirdly, that there be no unclean or unchaste signification contained in the metaphor, which may offend against modest and reverend minds.³⁸

The reference to ‘modest and reverend minds’ is an appeal to decorum to curb the faults or excesses of metaphor’s function, to ensure a metaphor is restrained by comparing only similar subjects, and that the associations it conjures be ‘chaste’.³⁹

Peacham calls for the control of a metaphor’s semantic abilities, to be moderate and not proliferate in size and meaning. Shakespeare’s use of metaphor frequently reverses every one of Peacham’s admonitions in the way he combines dissimilar

³⁶ Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham, p. 238.

³⁷ Peacham agrees with the potentially dark consequences of using tropes. He warns that figures of speech ‘may make his speech as clear as the noon day: or contrariwise, as it were with clouds and foggy mists, he may cover it with darkness, he may stir up storms and troublesome tempests’. Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, London, 1577, sig. Aiii at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 November 2014]. Similarly, the idea of error as concealing meaning is one that Shakespeare employs, discussed below at 0.3.

³⁸ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1593), p. 14 at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 November 2014]. (Not in 1577 edition as used above). Any offence given to ‘modest and reverend minds’ may more specifically be caused by smutty connotations or double entendres.

³⁹ These ideas have their precedent in The *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, which counsels that ‘a metaphor ought to be restrained, so as to be a transition with good reason to a kindred thing, and not seem an indiscriminate, reckless, and precipitate leap to an unlike thing’. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, (London, Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 345.

subjects that generate associations and meaning, and which support ambiguity rather than prevent it (examined in chapter four). Shakespeare's use of figuration, then, is misleading and is not in accordance with the clear and distinct language that Puttenham and Peacham value.⁴⁰ They construct a norm or rule for use from which Shakespeare often deviates. Thus his strong use of metaphor and other figures is language in error.⁴¹

Both Puttenham and Peacham valorise plain and simple language that opposes figurative language. Yet especially for Puttenham, the difficulty comes in the necessity of tropes to poetry: they are both ornaments and abuses. Use of tropes defines poetic language (at least for Puttenham), while the same language is in error. William Poole argues that the problem of deciding whether a trope was an 'abuse' of speech or an aid to eloquence was a problem of definition that preceded the Renaissance, stating that '[t]o take the two most popular authorities, Quintilian and the earlier *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the former praises while the latter rebukes certain figures.'⁴² The 'error' of speech, or at least its potential, is an ineradicable feature of poetic language. Furthermore the boundary between the proper and improper use of language is ambiguous and therefore the identification of linguistic error cannot be made with certainty.

In his theory of *copia*, Erasmus is caught between the imperative both to extend and restrain. He cautions against metaphor that is 'harsh, coarse, overdone, unlikely, or used too frequently',⁴³ whilst advocating amplifying and varying speech through the use of the figures. As he states, '[v]ariety depends in particular on the use

⁴⁰ Puttenham position on tropes is complex. He recognises their necessity, devoting much of his *Art of English Poetry* to them, yet he also describes them as 'abuses' of language.

⁴¹ See the section 0.2.2 'Figurative Language as Error' for further discussion.

⁴² Poole, 'The Vices of Style', p. 238.

⁴³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Literary and Educational Writings 2: De Copia and De Ratione Studii*, ed. Craig Thompson, Collected Works of Erasmus, 24 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 335.

of figures'.⁴⁴ Figures of speech, particularly from those authors who have a rich style, must be identified, memorised and practised by 'constant employment' if an abundant style is to be achieved.⁴⁵ Erasmus defines *copia* as verbal 'richness of expression' which involves 'synonyms, heterosis or enallage, metaphor, variation in word form, equivalence', in combination with richness of subject-matter, which is the use of 'examples, comparisons, similarities, dissimilarities, [and] opposites'.⁴⁶ *Copia* encourages amplification through proliferation, to repeat or restate a subject and to take pleasure in doing so. Terence Cave notes Erasmus's 'distaste for systematization and [a] preference for a mobile, open-ended treatment of topics',⁴⁷ which contrasts with Puttenham and Peacham's approach to figurative language through order and restraint.⁴⁸

Shakespeare's use of error overlaps in several ways with *copia*, not just in his use of tropes but in his frequently digressive, abundant style.⁴⁹ Erasmus's 'mobile' manner is, in this way, wandering, and his resistance to the rules is echoed by Shakespeare's later challenge to formal expectations, such as genre, the unities, or decorous language, explored in chapter five. Shakespeare's frequently wandering, erratic discourse might be described as copious and here I give three brief

⁴⁴ Erasmus, *Copia*, ed. Thompson, p. 658. On the subject of variety, Erasmus states 'Variety is so powerful in every sphere that there is absolutely nothing, however brilliant, which is not dimmed if not commended by variety.' Erasmus, *Copia*, ed. Thompson, p. 302.

⁴⁵ Erasmus, *Copia*, ed. Thompson, p. 303.

⁴⁶ Erasmus, *Copia*, ed. Thompson, p. 301.

⁴⁷ Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 22.

⁴⁸ It is important not to overstate the wildness of Erasmus's theory of *copia*, for he advocates a controlled form of proliferation.

⁴⁹ Shakespeare's copiousness is noted by his contemporary, John Webster. In 'To the Reader', Webster describes Shakespeare as 'happy and copious', in contrast to Jonson and his 'laboured and understanding works'. John Webster, *The White Devil* (London, 1612), Sig.B.r. at EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 21 May March 2014].

examples.⁵⁰ Feste and Maria provide some comically copious dialogue in *Twelfth*

Night:

- Mar. Nay, either tell me where thou has been, or
I will not open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter,
in way of thy excuse. My lady will hang thee for
thy absence.
- Clo. Let her hang me! He that is well hang'd in
This world needs to fear no colors. (I.5.1-6)

Maria compares the space between her lips as to one so small that a bristle could not fit to express her silence. Feste uses enallage to vary 'hang' to 'hang'd', comparing himself to another who faces the same fate. He bawdily varies the meaning of 'hang'd' from strangling to being well-endowed. To 'fear no colors' is proverbial for 'fear nothing', but is also Feste's pun on 'collars', being the hanging noose. Later, Maria continues with a digression about the origin of the proverb 'fear no colors'. The larger purpose of the scene is digression. Feste attempts and succeeds in proving Olivia a fool and himself wise, a challenge Olivia agrees to 'for want of other idleness' (I.5.65). This scene is explicitly identified as a playful divergence which uses aspects of *copia* for delight and pleasure.⁵¹

Mistress Quickly is an excessive but erroneous speaker. For Erasmus, digression and anecdote can be a useful aid to enriched expression, but Quickly is frequently tempted too far into what Erasmus deems to be faulty *copia*. He instructs that copious speech must have 'no irrelevant examples, no flat maxims, no excessively long digressions at inappropriate points', which her language frequently displays.⁵² For example, speaking aside to Simple she says,

But notwithstanding, man, I'll do you your master

⁵⁰ For further discussion of Shakespearean *copia* see Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 195-204 and Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987).

⁵¹ For more on Shakespearean *copia*, see the discussion of Mistress Quickly's dilatory speech to Falstaff in 1.1.2. and the discussion of Bottom's expansive dialogue in 2.4.5.1.

⁵² Erasmus, *Copia*, Thompson, p. 658.

what good I can: and the very yea and the no is,
 the French doctor, my master, (I may call him my
 master, look you, for I keep his house; and I
 wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and
 drink, make the beds and do all myself)— (I.4.92-7)

Her phrase ‘the very yea and the no’ is a ‘flat maxim’, given that she never reaches the point of her speech as this phrase suggests she imminently will. She never delivers her point to Simple because she interrupts herself with her own digression to justify the self-evident fact that the French doctor is her master. In this divergence, here given in parenthesis, she expands upon a long list of tasks, each a variation on her role. This may be both one of Erasmus’s ‘irrelevant examples’ and ‘excessively long digressions’ which distances her language from a successful abundant style and moves it closer to its parody. Quickly’s language often digresses, as explored in chapter one, and it seems that Shakespeare is playing with the boundaries of eloquence by pushing what could be copious language into meaningless proliferation.

In contrast with the failed, comic style of Quickly, Falstaff is a more successful copious speaker. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, after declaring he wishes to ‘make love to Ford’s wife’ (I.1.44), Falstaff says

O, she did so course o’er my exteriors with
 such a greedy intention, that the appetite of her
 eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass!
 Here’s another letter to her: she bears the purse too;
 she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will
 be cheaters to them both, and they shall be
 exchequers to me; they shall be my East and West
 Indies, and I will trade to them both. (I.3.65-72)

He metaphorizes both himself and Mistress Ford as countries or landscapes. She ‘did so course’ over him, hunting over his ‘exteriors’. He then varies this image by comparing her zeal to a burning glass that scorches him. He represents her (presumed) desire through the allegory of a bounteous country, comparing her to

Guiana. He uses chiasmus to suggest his trading exchanges with the Fords: he will be ‘cheaters’ to them and they shall be ‘exchequers’ to him. To ‘trade’ with them is a punning metaphor on deception. His language exemplifies *copia* through its style and subject. Both draw on ‘wealth’, being the meaning of *copia*, as Falstaff frames description of the ‘gold and bounty’ of Guiana in a rich, ‘wealthy’ style. Through comparison, variation, digression and figures of speech his dialogue is copious in a controlled manner.

Falstaff is one of Shakespeare’s most copious characters. Consequently, he is the target of anti-error sentiment and attempts are made by other characters to correct his behaviour. The ending of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* stages Falstaff’s correction of which Mistress Page and Mistress Ford will be ‘the ministers’ (IV.2.219). They plan to humiliate Falstaff publically by making him dress up as ‘Herne the Hunter’ with horns on his head, then disguising their children as fairies they will ‘Let the supposed fairies pinch him sound, and burn him with their tapers’ (IV.4.62). Afterwards, ‘the truth being known, we’ll all present ourselves; dishorn the spirit and mock him home to Windsor’, which they succeed in doing: he is ridiculed and socially shamed as a type of both revenge and correction (IV.4.63-4).

In 2 *Henry IV*, Falstaff is again chastised and corrected by the Lord Chief Justice for his improper friendship with Prince Hal and his infamous lifestyle. The Justice says to him, ‘your waste is great’ (I.2.140). ‘Waste’ puns on ‘waist’, suggesting that Falstaff is wasting language, words, and time, in an unnecessary excessiveness reminiscent of his huge waist.⁵³ Falstaff’s constant quibbling, digressing and punning are partly the target of the Justice’s attack on his ‘waste’, in

⁵³ This is discussed by Parker, who writes against the Lord’s depreciation and contempt, reclaiming Falstaff’s value of copia and excess. She reclaims the ‘fat’ of the text and its overgrown, expansive figures, such as Falstaff, who constantly dilate. Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 20 and pp. 8-35. To do so is to value errancy, in the sense that the ‘dilation’ Parker identifies is also a digression and the ‘swelling’ also a wandering.

this case of language. The Justice later comments on Falstaff's constant linguistic inversion: 'I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way' (II.1.110). It is significant that it is the Lord Chief Justice who levies such accusations, being in a position of authority and an ultimate enforcer of the law. He is a figure of correction who contrasts with Falstaff as a figure of error. Yet despite the Justice's apparently serious reprimand of Falstaff for having 'misled the youthful prince' (I.2.144), the Justice's language proliferates in the same way that he attempts to control in Falstaff, in its 'wasteful' excessiveness. For example, he dwells on the point of Falstaff's age:

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth,
that are written down old with all the characters of
age? Have you not a moist eye? A dry hand? A
yellow cheek? A white beard? A decreasing leg? An
increasing belly? Is not your voice broken? Your
wind short? Your chin double? Your wit single? And
every part about you blasted with antiquity? And
will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John! (I.2.179-86)

His digression is considerable, listing in detail the parts of Falstaff's body that represent his old age rather than his youth. In demonstrating the same kind of linguistic 'waste' whilst at the same time chastising Falstaff, his role as a corrector becomes ironic.

The Lord Chief Justice is one of several of Shakespeare's comic or ironic correctors. This type is repeated in *Twelfth Night* with Malvolio who represents puritanical disdain for Toby Belch's drinking and revelry, and exhorts Belch to 'separate yourself and your misdemeanours' (II.3.98). Yet Malvolio's self-aggrandisement and yellow stockings render his reforming pronouncements just as ridiculous (II.5) and he is treated as a figure to be mocked by Toby Belch, Maria and Feste. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Hugh Evans is another correcting character, this time in the form of a Latin teacher. He chastises the schoolboy Will for his Latin

mistakes, but Evans's corrections are just as faulty (IV.1). The result is a chaotic scene of misunderstandings that cannot be corrected because every correction becomes another error. I argue in chapter one that this scene is also the correction of Mistress Quickly and the 'mother tongue'. In all three cases, the correctors are mocked and their reforming efforts fail or are at least have restricted success.

The Lord Chief Justice, Malvolio and Hugh Evans are comparable with Peacham and Puttenham in that they seek to restrain and purify.⁵⁴ The notions of what is correct which are seriously advocated in Peacham and Puttenham are made ironic in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's recurring theme of the erroneous corrector satirises the idea of correction itself. Consequently, it is not just that the errors remain uncorrected, but the sense that they require correction is undermined. Shakespeare's depreciation of correction through his use of flawed or mocked correctors reflects his own rejection of the ideal of 'correct' language.

0.2.3 Misreadings

Understanding tropes, specifically metaphor, involves correcting a misapprehension. To read figurative language literally is the first error of interpretation: the audience must re-read to select the appropriate mode of interpretation. Error is the key to making meaning of figurative language. There are some highly metaphorical moments in Shakespearean drama that demonstrate the need for this corrective

⁵⁴ The Justice's worry about Falstaff's 'manner of wrenching the true cause the false way' (II.1.110), of reversing truth and falsity echoes Puttenham's concern for moving from 'plainness and simplicity to a certain doubleness', and Peacham's anxiety that certain linguistic uses 'shall obscure the thing that would fain make evident'. Peacham decries 'unclean' signification, and the same association of dirt and impurity is used to describe Falstaff as an 'unclean knight' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV.4.59) Peacham's didacticism that seeks to prevent offence to 'modest and reverend minds' echoes Malvolio's objections to Toby Belch that appeal to modesty and decorum, as Malvolio asks, 'Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?' (II.3.91). Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham, p. 238. Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1593), p. 14 at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 November 2014].

methodology.⁵⁵ In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne says 'So ere you find where light in darkness lies, | Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes' (I.1.78-9). On first reading, this sentence does not make sense. The experience of error prompts rereading from a different angle. Interpretation, in this way, is aided by error in arriving at a more abstract, complex meaning where 'losing' one's eyes is a metonym for losing one's capacity to understand than a literal loss of the eyes. Light in this context is not just literal illumination but enlightenment, where the inability to read leads to intellectual blindness. The paradox of finding light in darkness begins to make more sense when taken out of the literal context. A more extreme example of this interpretative methodology through error is discussed in chapter four with Bottom's metalepses, which defy literal reading but also resist figurative interpretation.

With Falstaff, these interpretative errors of the audience become self-conscious through puns. Realising his words do not make sense literally and that his audience would fall into error in that interpretation, Falstaff uses puns to highlight his awareness of this, enjoying the interplay between the different meanings. To take a relatively simple example, after being thrown in the Thames he arrives complaining and dripping wet. He says, 'Mistress Ford? I have had ford enough. I was thrown in to the ford; I have my belly full of ford' (III.5.35-7, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*). 'Ford' is the crux of the wordplay here, referring to both the water and the person. He has been soaked and swallowed lots of water, while on another level he is complaining of his ill-treatment at Mistress Ford's hands. The error of interpretation

⁵⁵ On Shakespeare and metaphor see Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson, *Shakespeare: Meaning and Metaphor* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987); Judith H. Anderson, *Words That Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Simon Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Derek Attridge, 'Performing Metaphors: The Singularity of Literary Figuration' *Paragraph* 28, no. 2 (2005), 18-34; Maria Franziska Fahey, *Unchaste Signification: Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

is never properly corrected: because of the nature of the pun, neither the literal water nor the figurative person is shown to be the 'correct' interpretation. When dealing with figurative language, the error of literal interpretation, which requires a figurative methodology to correct it, is confounded by the indeterminacy of error in its plurality: both literal and figurative readings obtain. Semantic multiplicity is fundamental to figurative language but does not necessarily pose a problem to comprehension. Here I am simply highlighting the process of moving from literal to figurative meaning via error.

Often, when a scene begins we are led to interpret the dialogue in one way, before something leads us to reassess our approach. This process can happen very rapidly in the act of reading, where it is clear almost from the beginning that a literal reading is not appropriate and a figurative one is quickly sought. Yet at other times this process decelerates, and for a longer period we labour under a mistake until we realise our error and re-read to reassess the meaning. The first time one of the twins is confused in *The Comedy of Errors*, the process of audience correction is elongated and for the characters this takes even longer. Antipholus of Syracuse gives a bag of money to the wrong Dromio (of Ephesus) and commands him to leave. Dromio responds 'Many a man would take you at your word. And go indeed, having so good a mean' (I.2.16-7). The watching audience and even the reader may think this moment unremarkable – Antipholus's error is not alluded to here and he is allowed to carry on uncorrected for another twenty four lines until he is given a hint of his mistake when the other Dromio enters, which surprises Antipholus: 'What now? How chance thou art return'd so soon?' (I.2.42). As this is the first time either of the twins have been confused, the audience's experience may well mirror Antipholus's surprise. Believing that there is only one Dromio is a misreading, and it is an error

that is not corrected for the characters until the end of the play. Yet for the audience this process is faster, and sooner or later they realise that the confusion is caused by two pairs of twins. At some point the audience's interpretation shifts, becoming an error corrected, and at this point dramatic irony can begin, where the audience can understand double meanings in the dialogue.

Another example of linguistic error comes from Orsino in the opening of *Twelfth Night* with a lyrical but insincere analogy between music, food and love (I.1). He and his servant Curio represent the difference and potential conflict between 'ordinary' and 'literary' language. Refusing to participate in Orsino's copious, abstract discourse or perhaps not understanding it, Curio asks a simple question:

	Will you go hunt, my lord?	
Duke	What, Curio?	
Cur.	The hart.	
Duke	Why, so I do, the noblest that I have. O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first, Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence! That instant was I turned into a hart, And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, E'er since pursue me.	(I.1.16-20)

It is only when Orsino describes himself as the 'hart' that his pun and subsequent extended hunting metaphor of love becomes explicit, that he is not answering Curio's question but pursuing a different path. Before then the audience are left confused as to precisely what Orsino is talking about, especially his reference to 'pestilence' which does not easily fit into the frames of hunting, loving or eating. His description of the hart as the 'noblest that I have' first suggests Olivia, as the unattainable object, which would make him the 'cruel hounds' in seeking her love. But the last part of his speech changes direction again, as he figures himself as the hart, and his 'desires' the hounds, excluding Olivia from the imagery altogether. The process is one of error and correction, as the audience is taken from a literal question into a metaphor

through a pun. It metaphorically portrays two lovers as hunter and prey and is then reconfigured into a narcissistic chase for the self, for Orsino's own 'hart'. The winding, interpretative errors create an ongoing cycle of error and correction that is part of the playfulness of interpretation for the characters in understanding each other and for the audience.

0.2.4 Ambiguity and Folded Language

Whereas some errors and their correction are integrated into interpretation, there is, however, another form of error that does not require correction: ambiguity. Abraham Fraunce says that amphibole or ambiguity is 'when a sentence may be turned both wayes, so that a man shall be uncertayne what way to take.'⁵⁶ Fraunce metaphorises ambiguity as an uncertainty about which 'way to take', where the incorrect path cannot always be identified with certainty, and meaning is therefore left as a choice for the reader. As Mullaney states, 'Amphibology marks an aspect of language that neither treason nor authority can control. It is a power that cannot be trammelled up, mastered, or unequivocally defined, but it is a power: it compels and moves the speaker or auditor.'⁵⁷ Ambiguity and error resist authority because they resist definition. The anxiety towards the incorrect can be identified in Puttenham and other rhetorical writers who fear the power of this uncontrollable language and recommend using it sparingly. Yet the nature of poetic language in its use of figuration invites ambiguity and therefore error, challenging readers to embrace a form of language that resists control. Mullaney claims ambiguous language firmly for 'treason's spectacle', but this ignores the alternative perspective of error as democratising for the reader. The lack of authority possessed by erroneous language

⁵⁶ Abraham Fraunce, *The Lawyers Logicke* (1588, rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), p. 27.

⁵⁷ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 125.

means there is no need for correction of the reader.⁵⁸ This is the pleasure of the text: to be creative in interpretation with impunity. Dissent and pleasure are linked, represented in the figure of Falstaff who is happy in his dissenting bonhomie.

The subversive potential of figuration perhaps explains the tradition of suspicion towards it, as discussed above in 0.2.2. This is partly because figurative language allows concealment, also conceptualised as folding. William Scott refers to language as a ‘faithful unfolding’, suggesting that reading and writing is a process of reliable revelation.⁵⁹ Shakespeare’s attitude to the relation between folding and language is less trusting. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse describes his own language and understanding as ‘smother’d in errors’ and asks Luciana to teach him ‘The folded meaning of your words’ deceit’ (III.2.35-6). After all the tortuous misunderstandings of the play, language itself becomes something not transparent but enclosed. Like a letter folded in on itself the meaning is concealed, even sealed against reading.

Meaning has to be unveiled or even constructed, like many of the folded letters with their codes of meaning that constantly appear in Shakespeare’s plays. Whilst sleepwalking, Lady Macbeth writes on a piece of paper that she has retrieved from a locked closet. Her servant recounts what she has witnessed: ‘I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon’t, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep’ (V.1.4-8). Intriguingly she folds it before she writes upon it. The opaque significance of ‘folding’ suggests that it is a problematic action:

⁵⁸ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 126.

⁵⁹ William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, written 1599), p. 6.

somehow it serves to conceal her words as she folds the paper before writing on it.⁶⁰

‘Folding’ disguises her meaning, evoking Puttenham’s view of figurative language as ‘guileful’, suggesting that figurative language is in some ways also folded.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, when Antipholus refers to Luciana’s ‘folded meaning’, he suggests an image of words on paper folded over and over, as if the folds themselves were part of the deceit obscuring the truth behind the words (III.2.35-6). Shakespeare qualifies Antipholus’s claim two lines down by introducing the idea of meaning contained in a fold, that his understanding has been made to ‘wander’ in an ‘unknown field’ (III.2.38). To fold off is to contain sheep on a piece of land to manure it, making it fecund. It is as if Luciana’s deceitful words are fertile, which of course for Shakespeare they are: the error or unintentional deceit of Antipholus speaking to the wrong woman becomes the main theme of the play. Shakespeare uses the image of the fold metalinguistically: it symbolises ambiguity while at the same time he employs it in ambiguous ways.

Similarly in ‘The Rape of Lucrece’ (1593-4), written approximately at the same time as *Errors*, ‘fold’ signifies deceitful language: ‘nor fold my fault in cleanly coin’d excuses’ (1072). ‘Fold’ here indicates envelopment, that the fault could be wrapped around and disguised in well-reasoned, fabricated excuses, yet again it puns on containing sheep in a ‘fold’ to pen them: ‘The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries; | Till with her own white fleece her voice controll’d | Entombs her outcry in her lips’ sweet fold’ (678-9).⁶¹ The discussion of the wolf and lambs leads the interpretation towards penning of animals but it also relates to the containment of words. But once again meaning is shifted and the mouth is described as a ‘sweet

⁶⁰ Alternatively the folding may signal that this is a letter. Paper was sometimes folded before writing to guide the writer where to write, since if you write in the wrong place, the breaking open of the wax seal might cause a loss of text. My thanks go to Alan Stewart for his help on this.

⁶¹ The fold is also the crease of the mouth, the lips being generative of both language and occlusion of meaning.

fold' (679), like a crease of paper with a dark centre. As the mouth issues meaning perhaps the fold of a paper, its space of darkness and concealment, issues or alters meaning. The printed and spoken word are brought together here through the fold of the mouth or the fold of the page, with uncertainty about what might emerge.

Shakespeare's image of the 'fold' has a variety of meanings, including crooked, obscure, deceitful, enfolded, and to take a winding course; it leads to error but also conceals it.

Metaphor, perhaps more than any other linguistic device, requires 'faithful unfolding', given its deceitful, erroneous character. Yet Richard Mulcaster argues that concealing is essential to poetic language. He emphasises the importance, in fact necessity, of metaphor and concealment: 'For when the poetes write sadly and soberly, without counterfeiting though they write in verse, yet they be no poetes in that kinde of their writing: but where they couer a truth with a fabulous veele [veil], and resemble with alteration'.⁶² Mulcaster argues that to 'cover' and 'alter' is essential to the poet's work. Yet it is to this that Theseus most objects: 'as imagination bodies forth | The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen | Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing | A local habitation and a name. | Such tricks hath strong imagination' (V.1.14-8, *Dream*). In contrast to Mulcaster, Theseus finds this kind of imaginative work unsettling in the way that it can create something out of nothing, claiming that it is merely a 'trick'. He objects specifically to metaphor, that the poet takes one thing as something else, seeing 'Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt' (V.1.11). This mode of perception is a kind of madness: he claims that the lunatic and the poet 'Are of imagination all compact' (V.1.8). By using this kind of imagination, 'one sees more devils than vast hell can hold' (V.1.9). Theseus's

⁶² Mulcaster, *Positions* (London, 1581), p. 273 at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 23 November 2014].

concern for the deception of ‘fancy’ is so strong that he claims it leads to hellish madness, even Lecercle’s delirium.

This section on the themes of error began by establishing the early modern meaning of error as wandering. Figurative language as a form of wandering away from plain, straightforward meaning is a kind of error, to which some early modern writers objected. ‘Misreadings’ develops the idea of figurative language as error and demonstrates that misreading is central to the process of interpreting figurative language. The section ‘Ambiguity and Folded Language’ argues that the nature of poetic language in its use of figuration often invites ambiguity and therefore error. This section highlights Shakespeare’s conceptualisation of ambiguity as folding and concealment. The error of figuration is an act of enfolding the ‘plain’, literal force of the words and is both an essential and objectionable component of poetic language.

0.3 Use and Meaning of ‘Error’ in Shakespeare

Shakespeare employs different meanings and associations of ‘error’ throughout his drama. ‘Error’ occurs thirty-five times in the plays; ‘Err’ seventeen; ‘err’d’ three; ‘errand(s)’ twenty-one; ‘errant’ once; ‘errest’ once; ‘erring’ five; and ‘erroneous’ twice.⁶³ As the following examples will illustrate, these uses employ the meaning and associations of wandering, ambiguity, folding, deceit, figuration and misinterpretation, discussed above. Significantly, the final example introduces a new dimension of ‘error’ as a fundamental literary structure.

The first example is of error as deceit. In *Julius Caesar* (1599), Cassius’s error is to commit suicide because he incorrectly believes Titinius has been captured by the enemy. Messala confirms Cassius’s greater mistake which is to die at the

⁶³ See entries in John Bartlett, *Concordance of Shakespeare*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 450.

moment of victory: 'Octavius is overthrown by noble Brutus' power' (V.3.51).

Standing over Cassius's body Messala says

Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.
O hateful error, melancholy's child,
Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
The things that are not? O error, soon conceived,
Thou never comest unto a happy birth,
But kill'st the mother that engender'd thee! (V.3.66-71)

Cassius's death is framed in terms of error. It is mistrust and deceit, revealing false appearance, dissembling 'things that are not': Messala's objection to error, that it is misleading in appearance, echoes the sentiments of Puttenham, Erasmus and Peacham.⁶⁴ It is 'soon conceiv'd', easy to fall into and never 'happy' or desirable.⁶⁵ He describes melancholy as producing error: error is 'melancholy's child'. This introduces the recurring symbol of childbirth and error that is explored in chapter one. He uses imagery of production, yet error is not productive: it 'kill'st the mother that engend'red thee!' It is a disrupter, killing the parent, fragmenting the lineal bond and the family.⁶⁶ By aligning the consequences of error with matricide, Messala highlights it as unnatural and perverse.⁶⁷ In this scene, error proliferates without the 'mother'. On seeing the dead Cassius, Titinius proves Messala's words true by acting hastily and killing himself over the body, creating another child of error (V.3.90).

The association between error and deceit continues in *King John* (1594-6).

Behold, the French amazed vouchsafe a parole;
And now, instead of bullets wrapp'd in fire,
To make a shaking fever in your walls,
They shoot but calm words folded up in smoke,
To make a faithless error in your ears (II.1.226-30)

King John is addressing the people of Angiers. The King of England and the King of France both try to convince Angiers to side with them. In doing so, King John

⁶⁴ See fn.1, this section.

⁶⁵ For discussion of productive errors, see section two.

⁶⁶ The relations between producing children and producing language are explored in chapter one.

⁶⁷ For further discussion of the causal role of error in tragedy, see 5.1.1.

participates in a rhetorical competition as a substitute for battle. He turns the ‘bullets wrapp’d in fire’, that the French would be sure to release on Angiers into ‘calm words folded up in smoke’. The smoke represents the potential of battle suspended by the negotiations of the ‘calm words’: Angiers will receive the smoke and not the fire, but King John warns of what will happen if they follow French ‘error’. The smoke is a metaphor for the obfuscations of the French which conceals the error lurking beneath. It is also another example of the figuration of error in terms of folding, as discussed above. The error is not folded like Lady Macbeth’s page but enfolded, as in surrounded, obscuring the words through mists of smoke. The ‘calm words’ instead of the fiery bullets have the power to make Angiers fall into the mistake of believing that the French King is the rightful ruler. The modulation from the ‘bullets wrapp’d in fire’ to smoke-wrapped words downgrades the appearance of their destructive potential but not their effect. The stakes of error are high: it determines who will rule and in whom the nation should believe. The French will offer ‘a faithless error’ as the word-smoke flows into the ears of the citizens of Angiers. The ‘faithless’ lie suggests that the word-smoke is drifting, detached from truth and right. ‘Faithless’ works on both the subject and object: the error itself is faithless and it creates faithlessness in the receiver; the words are corrupt and corrupting.

Error can have a productive rather than destructive role. Shakespeare’s use of error ranges from the ‘misleading’ and ‘deceitful’ to the useful ‘wandering’. In *Cymbeline*, the ghosts of Posthumus’s family appear to him in a dream, after which he says,

Poor wretches that depend
On greatness’ favour dream as I have done,
Wake and find nothing. But, alas, I swerve:
Many dream not to find, neither deserve,

And yet are steep'd in favours: so am I,
That have this golden chance and know not why. (V.4.127-32)

Posthumus declares 'I swerve', meaning both to be in error and to digress. His 'swerve' is an error in that he reprimands himself for bemoaning his lost family. He wakes and finds 'nothing' after the dream, whereas others' families are absent even in sleep: they 'dream not to find'. This is a critically-accepted interpretation of the word 'swerve'. Roger Warren glosses it as to 'go astray (i.e. am wrong)'.⁶⁸ Yet Warren's choice of 'astray' hints at a latent, overlapping meaning. Error as mistake is framed in terms of movement: to be wrong is to meander. 'Swerve' may also refer to the dream where Posthumus deviates from daylight reality into a contiguous world of ghosts and gods.⁶⁹ He laments this digression since it reveals something to him that he cannot keep, hence his forlorn 'alas'. This interpretation of 'swerve', however, is not corrective and is not attached to any mistake. Instead it is more of a happy digression into a 'golden chance'.

In *Othello* (1604), 'error' also ambiguously means both mistake and digression. Iago describes Othello as an 'erring barbarian', meaning that he has travelled widely, emphasising his status as a foreigner and a naval captain (I.3.355-6). This is supported by Roderigo's description of Othello as 'an extravagant and wheeling stranger | Of here and everywhere', from 'extra' meaning outside and 'vagari' to wander (I.1.136-7).⁷⁰ This constructs him as one who roams beyond limits in both the style of his storytelling that is grandiose and fantastic, and his profession which involves crossing national borders. With his stories of 'moving accidents by flood and field, | Of hair-breadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach' he woos not only Desdemona but Brabantio (I.3.135-6). These stories stray beyond the literal into

⁶⁸ Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. Roger Warren, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 238.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the variety of dreams in Shakespearean drama, see Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: from Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁷⁰ See *OED* entry on 'extravagate' <www.oed.com> [date accessed 22 October 2014].

fiction.⁷¹ Yet significantly interpretation of ‘erring’ as related to travelling and storytelling is affected by Othello’s contested rectitude. His status as misplaced and erroneous precipitates his own sense of identity as the wrong captain, husband and race. Brabantio says that Desdemona has ‘shunn’d the wealthy curled [darlings] of our nation...run from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou’ (I.2.67-71). Brabantio claims ownership of ‘our nation’, thus excluding Othello and marking him as the wrong choice for Desdemona. Brabantio’s exclusion has a clear racial basis, evidenced by his reference to Othello’s ‘sooty bosom’. In Iago’s description of Othello as ‘erring’, the valency of the word is altered, switching its meaning to faulty, base and fallen, from the journeying stranger and his alluring tales of such adventure (I.3.355-6).

Perhaps the most interesting example of ‘error’ comes in *The Winter’s Tale* which situates error, its concealments and revelations, at the centre of drama. Its occurrence in *The Winter’s Tale* encapsulates the positive and negative senses of error: its productive and dangerous potential; its alignment or eschewal by the moral categories of right and wrong; its association with folding, concealing and revealing; and its expression of linguistic copia and excess. The figure of Time interrupts the play to explain its error but not correct it. Time says,

I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror
Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,
Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
To use my wings. Impute it not a crime
To me or my swift passage, that I slide
O’er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
To o’erthrow law and in one self-born hour
To plant and o’erwhelm custom.

(IV.1.1-9)

⁷¹ Othello’s stories are fantastical to the point that he becomes less a relayer of a factual past and more a colourful storyteller. He refers to ‘hills whose [heads] touch heaven,’ and ‘men whose heads | [Do grow] beaneath their shoulders.’ (I.3.141, 145). His romantic tales have the appropriate effect on Desdemona, that he ‘often did beguile her of her tears’. (I.3.156)

Time's 'error' refers to the erring of the characters in their vicissitudes and victories, locating error at the centre of dramatic action. In this summative style, Time describes committing errors as essential to the characters' development over time. Again error is presented in terms of unfolding: time 'unfolds error', referring to its dramatic display.⁷² It shows the travails of characters through time in a process of revelation. A play folds and unfolds error which is a structuring principle of drama.

Time's 'error' is also a self-confession. Its 'crime' is to 'slide o'er sixteen years', to defy the unities of dramatic time and action that do not allow such leaps.⁷³ This error of stretching time is 'untried' and the 'gentle spectators' are asked that the error be excused or ignored, that the 'wide gap' be unexamined (IV.1.20). Yet this is not really a choice for the audience. The interruption is more of a demand than a request because Time is presented in a position of supreme power. It is a manager of dramatic action, surveying and controlling omnipotently. It has the liberty and power to be mistaken and to resist any pressure to correct and it does not minimise the consequences of its action. It recognises that to 'slide o'er sixteen years' will 'o'erthrow law' and 'o'erwhelm custom', two dominant structures for ordering society. This gives us a sense of the licence that Shakespeare is taking with the basic structure of drama: the audience are supposed to be aware of Time's error. Time wanders, takes liberties, breaks rules, and this is part of the freedom and pleasure of the play.

Time continues, 'Your patience this allowing, | I turn my glass and give my scene such growing | As you had slept between.' (IV.1.15-7). The error or liberty

⁷² The 'unfolding' of error could also refer to its resolution.

⁷³ Sidney made the neo-classical objection to violation of the unities in drama: 'Now of time they [playwrights] are much more liberal. For ordinary it is, that two young princes fall in love, after many adverses she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours' space; which, how absurd it is in sense, even sense may imagine, and art hath taught and all ancient examples justified'. Sidney, *An Apologie for poetrie* (1595) Kr.-K2v. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 23 November 2014].

with time that is referred to as ‘such growing’ returns us to the metaphors of pregnancy and error of Messala’s speech in *Julius Caesar* (see above). Error is an unnatural growth, as Time swells the minutes of the play into years. Time is the parent of error, engendering it, hoping that it will be as ‘soon conceived’ as is Cassius’s error in his own mind (V.3.69). Error leads to Cassius’s death, whereas in *The Winter’s Tale* it creates coherence through the suspension of reality. The deceptive quality that Messala deplores in *Julius Caesar*, that shows ‘things that are not’ (V.3.69), is necessary for the delivery of Hermione and the sense of the plot.⁷⁴ The ‘growing’ of time is likened to a dream. It is consistent with Posthumus’s impossible dream-swerve which is another error that enables Jupiter – like Time, a dominant ruler of dramatic action – to control the play by delivering his prophecy on a ‘tablet’ of stone (V.4.109, *Cymbeline*).

From just a selection of examples from the plays, we can see that Shakespeare represents error variously as pregnancy, smoke and dream. The number of meanings and associations demonstrate that the expansive concept of ‘error’ is productive for Shakespeare in the number of situations it can usefully operate. It is a term that expands into multiple meaning, while at the same time its wandering nature seems predisposed to push the boundaries of its own limits. Error, as liberated, flexible and happily deceptive, is useful, even crucial, for drama.

0.4 Literature Review

Error in the English Renaissance is an under-researched area. The marginalisation of ‘error’ can be explained through its association with ‘accident’, in that ‘error’ is an accidental accompaniment or an accessory.⁷⁵ It is something to be corrected or

⁷⁴ The moment where Hermione’s statue moves (V.3.99) is discussed in further detail in chapter five.

⁷⁵ See *OED* <www.oed.com> [date accessed 6 January 2013].

ignored and therefore questions about its status, function and politics in literature have been mainly unasked. There is no study of error in Shakespeare or in the English Renaissance more generally. François Rigolot, however, has examined the status of error in French Renaissance Literature. He argues for the exceptionality of error in the Renaissance, claiming that ‘elle n’a peut-être jamais mobilisé autant d’énergie, suscité autant de passions et finalement connu autant de manifestations qu’à une époque que nous continuons d’appeler, non sans une part d’arbitraire, la Renaissance.’⁷⁶ Rigolot covers errors of thought, such as doctrinal error, and errors of language, such as error and ambiguity. My study is a complement to his, in that I am working with similar research questions but in English Renaissance Literature, specifically Shakespeare. Yet he situates his study of error in the context of the Reformation. My thesis does not pursue this religious aspect of error in great detail.⁷⁷ Although the idea of sinfulness is highly relevant to an understanding of Renaissance error, Shakespearean error does not primarily draw upon this meaning.

Rigolot argues for a sense of error that is useful for my study, that error is an ambiguous feature, a mixture of right and wrong, truth and falsity, stretched between being innocuous or dangerous. For the Renaissance writer,

error can be identified as a regrettable mistake, an unforgivable faux pas; or, on the contrary, something he or she should be proud of, because it signals another order of truth, one that the common reader might not have grasped if it had been couched in the straightforward language of truth. This duplicitous level of meaning powerfully exemplifies the conflicting status of an important cognitive category that, in early modern times, triggers an ambiguous attitude, both of rejection and appropriation, condemnation and condonation, and prosecution and propitiation.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ François Rigolot, *L’Erreur de la Renaissance: Perspectives Littéraires* (Paris: Champions, 2002), p. 1. My translation: error ‘has perhaps never roused so much vigour, incited so much passion and in the end made so many appearances than in the epoch which we continue to call, somewhat arbitrarily, the Renaissance.’

⁷⁷ In chapter one I refer to the ‘The Faerie Queene’ and discuss Spenser’s representation of religious error. Shakespeare, however, does not engage with error in this way. Instead he focuses more on the interplay between mistakenness and wandering, especially regarding language.

⁷⁸ Rigolot, ‘The Renaissance Fascination with Error: Mannerism and Early Modern Poetry’ *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter, 2004), 1219-1234, p. 1219. Rigolot’s choice of the

Rigolot presents error as a new way of communicating ‘truth’, that despite its conception as a mistake it manages to stand outside the ‘straightforward language of truth’ to make meaning of a different kind.

In English Literature, two works pick up on the theme of ‘error’. Seth Lerer in *Error and the Academic Self*, argues that error finds greatest expression in the self-fashioning of the scholar: ‘the origins of error—as an ideology, a practice, a defining mode of scholarly identity—lie in the nexus of the editorial, the academic, and the political that has shaped textual adventures from the Renaissance to the present.’⁷⁹ The book has a narrow focus on a specific attribution or use of error, as does Julian Yates’s *Error, Misuse, Failure*. Yates works within material culture, arguing for the kind of knowledge that the failure of an object can secure, which he terms an ‘object lesson’. He focuses on portrait miniatures, relics, privies, the printed page and the priest-hole as objects that he claims are ‘prone to ‘error, misuse, and sometimes failure’.⁸⁰ These two texts begin by foregrounding the importance of error, which is useful for this thesis, but then examine it in texts, objects, temporalities and languages different from Shakespearean error or the early modern period in England more generally.

Because there has not been a sustained study of Shakespearean error, and error appears in different forms and relates to different themes, the books that this thesis engages with are various. Part of the job of this thesis is to pull together the different strands of critical interest into error and contiguous topics. In *The*

word ‘duplicitous’ is interesting as it connects to Erasmus’s title *De duplici copia rerum ac verborum commentarii duo*. Cave argues that in using ‘duplicity’, Erasmus only meant duality rather than deception but it is nonetheless an instructive parallel. See Cave, *The Cornucopia Text*, p. 34, fn.50.

⁷⁹ Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁸⁰ Julian Yates, *Error, Misuse, Failure: Object Lessons from the Renaissance*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. xix.

Inarticulate Renaissance, Carla Mazzio examines those moments which do not conform to the linguistic ideals of clear, articulate speech, arguing that the rhetorical ‘pursuit of eloquence’

had the power to overwrite an alternative history of involuted speech forms lodged in language practices, textual formations, and cultural phenomena that seemed, to many in the sixteenth century, antithetical to individual and communal coherence.⁸¹

She emphasises the historical context of the Renaissance as an ‘age of eloquence’, arguing for us to understand inarticulate Renaissance language as well as articulate.⁸²

Her study of miscommunication in Renaissance drama, however, does not find incorrect language to be gendered female, as I argue.⁸³ Whereas Mazzio focuses on faulty language across Renaissance drama, my thesis focuses more specifically on Shakespeare’s uses of error.

In his study of ‘loiterature’, Ross Chambers examines some concepts useful for this thesis, such as digressing, dilating and being distracted.⁸⁴ Loiterature is literature that ‘blurs categories, and in particular it blurs those of innocent pleasure

⁸¹ Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 1. See also Margaret Ferguson who explores the gendering as female these linguistic trouble or faultiness, especially ch. 2, *Dido’s Daughters*, pp. 83-134. She argues that in the battle to define the vernacular, ‘what is “barbarous” or “corrupt” is often gendered female and ideologically devalued.’ p. 116.

⁸² On the other hand N. F. Blake disagrees. Discussing language and particularly grammar he argues that ‘[i]t was not possible to go beyond those limits without producing lack of intelligibility’. N. F. Blake, *An Introduction to Shakespeare’s Grammar* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p. 5. Like Carla Mazzio, Jenny Mann attempts to go beyond the predominance of classical rhetoric over Renaissance language. Mann argues that in contrast with classical rhetoric, a nascent vernacular English rhetoric ‘was an outlaw itself, roaming at the margins of the classical tradition’. Jenny Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare’s England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 7.

⁸³ In her study of Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister*, she finds that the mumbling and faulty speaker, Madge Mumblecrust, is ‘only one part, and by no means the worst part, of a broad sociolinguistic community of lapsed pronunciation and rhetorical mayhem.’ Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 71.

⁸⁴ Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (University of Nebraska Press: London, 1999). For more on the relation between error, movement and digression see Nicholas Royle on veering: *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). Greenblatt discusses movement in relation to cross-dressing and heterosexuality through what he terms ‘swerving’. See *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 68-93. Patricia Parker’s work on digression, proliferation and amplification is also highly significant. She also works to reclaim the value of error. *Literary Fat Ladies* values the fat of the text, a metaphor for its verbal excesses, the things that can afford to be ‘cut’, such as errors.

taking and harmless relaxation and not-so-innocent “intent”—a certain recalcitrance to the laws that maintain “good order”.’ Loiterature, or just as easily error, ‘casts serious doubt on the values good citizens hold dear—values like discipline, method, organization, rationality, productivity, and, above all, work—but it does so in the guise of innocent and, more particularly, insignificant or frivolous entertainment’.⁸⁵ Error can be unsettling or subversive despite its superficial appearance. This is a concept I have developed in relation to Shakespearean error, with its wandering nature and linguistic digression that is more than simply being ‘insignificant or frivolous entertainment’.⁸⁶

Shakespeare’s playful, verbal excessiveness has been explored by Keir Elam through what he calls ‘language-games’. He identifies these as ‘the unclassical and indecorous linguistic *insubordination* that marks the comedies in their livelier moments’.⁸⁷ Elam argues that comic, often excessive language frequently foregrounds its own playfulness. One of the ways it does this is through ‘suspension’, which Elam defines as ‘all uses and abuses of language that tend to banish, or at least relegate to the margins, mere conceptual or illocutionary or dramatic content.’⁸⁸ These are nonsensical phrases; malapropisms; gratuitous neologizing; manic punning; or speaking in invented languages, all of which he finds examples for in Shakespearean comedy.⁸⁹ These puns, fabrications, and nonsense speech can all be grouped as errors, yet Elam does not call them such. One of the aims of this thesis is

⁸⁵ Chambers, *Loiterature*, p. 9.

⁸⁶ For example, characters such as Mistress Quickly (chapter one), Princess Katherine (chapter two), or Bottom (chapter four) are framed as ‘insignificant and frivolous’ but their role is of more political significance.

⁸⁷ Keir Elam, *Shakespeare’s Universe of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 3.

⁸⁸ Elam, *Shakespeare’s Universe of Discourse*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ M. M. Mahood emphasises the importance of Shakespearean wordplay and demonstrates the extent of its complex semantic structure. See also Kenneth Muir, ‘The Uncomic Pun’ *Cambridge Journal* 3 (1950), 472-85 and Margreta de Grazia, ‘Homonyms before and after Lexical Standardization’ *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch* (1990), 143-56.

to refocus some aspects of Shakespearean language through error, arguing that these ‘errors’ are useful, where ‘mistakenness’ is put to creative work.

In *The Cornucopian Text*, Terence Cave also investigates the playful excessiveness of Renaissance language. He notes the similarities between his Renaissance source texts and deconstruction, which both have an interest in plurality and excess, and contain multiple meaning that is displaced or obscured.⁹⁰ The plurality of discursive language that defines the ‘cornucopian text’ resists interpretation because it has several levels of meaning and because it blocks normal interpretative procedures. Cave argues that the discursive language of the sixteenth century insists on entertaining rather than eradicating playfulness, and that a poststructuralist methodology requires the same. Parker also draws a connection between copious, excessive language, deferral and Derridean ‘différance’.⁹¹ Chambers emphasises the connection between digression and poststructuralism: ‘*to dilate*, is etymologically related both to differing and to deferring...Derridean *différance* is therefore, not so surprisingly, intimately bound up with digression and dilatoriness’.⁹² Digression has a dominant place in postmodern culture and this thesis works with poststructuralist literary criticism as a useful way to approach the aberrant and anomalous and to understand the politics of those labels.

Poststructuralism also had an impact upon textual criticism, resulting in New Textualism, a movement that I draw upon, especially in chapter three. New Textualism recognises multiple texts behind the unitary figure of Shakespeare.⁹³ As

⁹⁰ See ‘Introduction’, especially pp. xxi-ii. Cave’s hypothesis of the ‘cornucopian text’ is characterised by a superabundance which, he notes, corresponds to the Derridean notion of the ‘supplement’ in its necessity and excess. See Derrida’s essay ‘différance’ in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 3-28 and *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁹¹ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 9.

⁹² Chambers, *Loiterature*, p. 11.

⁹³ For more on New Textualism see Randall McLeod, ‘UN Editing Shak-speare’ *SubStance*, Vol. 10/11, (1981/1982), pp. 26-55; Paul Werstine, ‘Narratives about Printed Shakespeare Texts: “Foul

Leah Marcus states, ‘Until recently, the successful edition of a literary work was one that created for its readers an aura of near transparency, or unmediated access to the author and his or her achievement...In very recent editions influenced by post-structuralist theory and by the new textual studies, the editor’s shaping hand is likely to be much more obvious.’⁹⁴ New Textualism changed the status of textual errors, rescuing them from the rubbish-bin and reclaimed by some as revealing the processes of the theatre or the printing house. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass claim that an early quarto or folio refuses ‘to yield to modern norms [and] bears witness to the specific history of the texts they make up, a history so specific that it cannot comply with modern notions of correctness and intelligibility.’⁹⁵ Error, or the things we label as error, is for them our link with history; textual error is the history of the text and the process of ‘correction’ is an ahistoricising. The ideology of the correct text wipes away the bumpy inconveniences of history. This has implications for how we should interpret or alter ‘errors’, destabilising an approach that perceives them as elements to be corrected. The recent reassessment of the category of ‘error’ informs a basis for my thesis which advocates the value of ‘error’ artistically, linguistically and politically.

0.5 Methodology

In certain ways, the matter of this thesis is resistant to its formal requirements. The context of an extended piece of research produces expectations of a clear argument which may be more of an arbitrary path, one that leads off in different directions, that

Papers” and “Bad” Quartos’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990), 65-86; Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996); Gabriel Egan, *The Struggle for Shakespeare’s Text: Twentieth-Century Editorial Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹⁴ Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, p. 4.

⁹⁵ Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, ‘The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 255-283, p. 257.

does not always return to coherency. There is a tension in exploring conceptually wandering error and using a rigorous, standardised methodology and discourse. To the extent that is possible, I have attempted to represent the material faithfully whilst fulfilling the requirements of argumentation and clarity of academic writing. The focus of error moves in different directions – a different direction for each chapter – which can be said to embrace wandering and the plurality of error. The topic of error is many-sided and the angles of approach are varied, yet through repeating themes and images the thesis is united. This study is still necessarily selective and I do not deal closely with Shakespeare in performance: the proliferation of errors onstage would be another project. Instead, it mainly focuses on Shakespeare and the book, as a printed object, enabling it to examine error in literary and textual contexts. It does not, however, ignore the fact that the material is dramatic and questions of performance are not excluded.

In valuing error, I attempt to understand the moments where a predisposition to ‘right’ or ‘truth’ breaks down or is resisted. Where this happens in Shakespeare, it is often for creative and political purposes. This thesis, then, argues that error and truth are in a dialectic, that at times there is truth in error and that they are not always divided according to the binary of valuable and invaluable.

Section 1. Erroneous Vessels: Gender, Otherness and Error

1.1. Error and the Mother Tongue

This chapter engages with the early modern concept of the ‘mother tongue’, a synonym for vernacular English. Closer inspection reveals the ways in which political ideology co-opts the mother tongue to engender a sense of national identity. The stereotypical symbol of the nurturing mother is used to naturalise the national language and create a sense of national identity based partly on an unstable vernacular. The first part of this chapter begins by discussing the instability of the vernacular and then the role of the mother tongue in naturalising it, giving it strength and authority. The mother tongue, then, is explored in terms of the nation and the national language it represents. The second part of the chapter evidences erroneous uses of female and male language through four case studies from early Shakespeare, with the last drawing a comparison to Edmund Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queene’.

This raises a prior conceptual question, of central concern in this chapter: what is the mother tongue? Perhaps the most familiar understanding of the mother tongue is as a metaphor for a native language, but the interplay of the concepts ‘mother’ and ‘tongue’, and their various connotations, afford a richer understanding of the mother tongue that questions this unitary meaning. The mother tongue may be, literally, the tongue of a mother figure, or female speech generally, or may be transexualised by the application of the image to male characters. Similarly, the import of the metaphor may vary. As a symbol of female speech, the mother tongue may represent ownership and transmission of language, rather than mere native endowment. By considering these permutations of the mother tongue, the analysis of this chapter will question its meaning directly, and conclude that the female

relationship with language, as illustrated in the following texts, is paradoxical.

Women are required to deliver the vernacular to the next generation. Yet women's language is repeatedly represented as being in error and this representation expresses an anxiety towards what they produce – both in terms of their reproductive and linguistic output – while at the same time marginalising them from the language and power they bear. The mother tongue rests on a contradiction: women's language is often presented as erratic as a way of disarming them of power, yet at the same time the vernacular belongs to them.

1.1.1. History, Nation, Language

The mother tongue raises issues of where language comes from, how it is passed on, who owns it in the first place, how we learn to speak and whether we ever manage to speak in our own tongue/voice/body. The meaning of the image is contained in the complex relationship between the metaphor itself and the material object, in this case the mother's tongue. The mother tongue is owned both by the country and the immediate, material parent. It enables the myth of linguistic purity, that English should not be invaded by 'foreign' parts, a myth that can be frequently identified in the sixteenth century. Florio interprets the mixture of English with other languages as a sign of its inferiority. It is 'confused, bepeesed with many tongues: it taketh many words of the latine, and mo from the French, and mo from the Italian, and many mo from the Dutich, some also from the Greeke, and from the Britaine, so that if every language had his owne wordes againe, there woulde but a fewe remaine for English men, and yet every day they adde'.¹ Despite Florio's multilingual credentials and his

¹ John Florio, *His First Fruits*, (1578), p. 51 v., at *EEBO*, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2013]. Edmund Coote echoes Florio's sentiment: 'Since the time of Chaucer, more Latin, and French has been mingled with our tongue then left out of it, but of late we have fallen to such borrowing of words from Latin, French, and other tongues, that it has been beyond all stay, and limit,

extensive works focusing on the crossovers between languages, he still wishes to see languages nationally partitioned and laments the expansion of the lexicon.

For him, languages are nationally owned and this mixing becomes a problem for the coherency of the nation. Mixed language shrinks and degenerates the nation. Florio perceives an erosion of the national language that comes from the past and affects the future: the history of English has been characterised by mixing with foreign language and it is a gradual, ongoing process of infiltration. This presents the concept of 'native' as already impure or bastardised. Translation across national boundaries is the founding condition of the possibility of shared language but here perceived as threatening national identity. The concept of the native language as already impure works against the ideology of the mother tongue: of a national vernacular with partly foreign origins.

Sir Philip Sidney agrees that the national language is an admixture of other languages. He complains that irregular or uncommon words can estrange a man from his nation: 'farre fette [far-fetched] words, that may seeme Monsters: but must seeme straungers to any poore English man.'² 'English' here implies a nation and language: the 'man' is English-speaking as well as an English native. This might seem an obvious statement, given the almost unconscious connection between language and nation that 'English' represents. Yet problems arise when the nation and language begin to come apart. Mixed language represents a fracturing not just of the vernacular but of national identity. For example, a xenophobic term such as

which albeit some of us do like well, and think our tongue thereby much better, yet do strangers therefore carry the far less opinion thereof, some saying that it is of itself no language at all, but the scum of many languages, others that it is most barren, and that we are daily faine to borrow words for it (as though it yet lacked making) out of other languages to patch it up withall, and that it we were put to repay our borrowed speech back again, to the languages that may lay claim unto it, we shall be left little better than dumb, or scarcely able to speak any thing that should be sensible.' Edmund Coote, *The English schoole-maister*, (1596), sig. Cc3 v. at EEBO, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2013].

² Sir Philip Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, (1595), K4r.

‘stranger’ was the usual name for foreigner.³ For Sidney, foreigners reside within English: the purity of the nation is already compromised. These ‘monsters’ are either strange uses of English or words borrowed from other languages that are unwelcome in the native vernacular because they divorce the native from his natural language. ‘Poore’ here is ambiguous. As well as encouraging sympathy for the confused man, it hints at the impoverishment of English despite Sidney’s repeated claim that it is as good as any classical precedent.⁴⁵

Critics have perceived this paucity of ‘truly’ English words. N. F. Blake argues that the use of wordplay and ambiguous language exploded in the Renaissance – not just for Shakespeare but for many other writers – because of the poverty of English. He claims that ‘[m]any modern writers think of this as a feature of Elizabethan drama which was introduced as a means of indicating certain colloquial and informal levels of speech. It is more reasonable, however, to regard it as an expression of the reaction to the poverty of English’.⁶ He states that ‘[t]he growth in wordplay parallels that of new words and there can be little doubt that both arose through the same causes’.⁷ He is unequivocal about the immaturity of the early modern vernacular which, I am arguing, has implications for the construction of national identity and the purpose of the ‘mother tongue’.

Blake argues that wordplay emerged for two reasons: first, because the paucity of the language forced writers to double up words and be inventive with the tools available, and second, to show that English could be as rhetorically

³ See the *OED* entry ‘stranger’ at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 14 November 2014].

⁴ Sidney is inconsistent, arguing against foreign interference then claiming ‘some will say it is a mingled language. And why not so much the better, taking the best of both the other?’ Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, Sig. L2v.

⁵ For example, Sidney argues that English is well-positioned ‘for the vttering sweetly, and properly the conceits of the minde, which is the end of speech, that hath it equally with any other tongue in the world’. Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, Sig. L2v.

⁶ N. F. Blake, *Shakespeare’s Language: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 19.

⁷ Blake, *Shakespeare’s Language*, p. 19.

commodious as Latin. By the middle of the seventeenth century, so he argues, the lexicon had rapidly expanded and it ‘was rich enough not to need the support of wordplay any more. Hence punning and other verbal excess came under increasing condemnation as the century progressed’ because ‘[p]ropriety and naturalness of expression were valued and correctness was considered a more appropriate method than verbal wordplay to improve the language’.⁸ Thus, we have a picture of the vernacular as so impoverished that it precipitated an entirely different attitude towards language use. There is a tension between those perceptions of early modern English through a classical tradition as capable, rule-based and able to follow classical precepts, and those which suggest it is impoverished, nascent, non-standardised and of mixed origin, creating meaning in unconventional ways, through uncommon usage or foreign translation.

1.1.1.1 Nationhood

The vernacular is one of the central determinants of national identity, and therefore national identity is destabilised by the impurity and poverty of the language. The mother tongue is a symbol used to resist this fragmentation, to confer authority and identity to language. It pulls together language and nation through the idea of universal origin and a shared tongue. Alongside many other critics, Carla Mazzio argues that the recent expansion of the vernacular effected a sense of English nationhood.⁹ More specifically, the idea that Shakespeare’s drama developed and defined the vernacular to such an extent that it was partly responsible for forging a sense of English nationality has been defended by Andrew Hadfield, David J. Baker

⁸ Blake, *Shakespeare’s Language*, p. 19. Blake’s use of ‘naturalness’ clashes directly with Attridge’s uncovering of the emptiness of such a term, that naturalness is in fact supplemented and then supplanted by decorum. Puttenham tries to claim that the rules of decorum are ‘natural’ but Attridge reveals them to be constructed by an elite group. Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, pp. 17-45.

⁹ Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, pp. 1-18.

and Willy Maley amongst others.¹⁰ Mazzio further aligns the rise of the vernacular and an emerging sense of nationhood with the Protestant reformers.¹¹ She argues that the profusion of foreign languages in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, 'can easily be interpreted as a testament to an emergent Protestant English nationalism defining itself as distinct from so much Catholic Iberian confusion'.¹² But if the language was unstable and expanding, constantly absorbing 'foreign bodies', this must have had some impact on the ability of the vernacular to unify geographically-determined subjects living in proximity to each other. If not just English with its range of accents, dialects, sociolects and ideolects, then Scottish, Irish and Welsh posed a significant challenge to the concept of an effective relation between language and nationhood, exemplified by the characters Fluellen (Welsh), Jamy (Scottish), and MacMorris (Irish) in *Henry V*. Thus, the idea that the rise of the vernacular was responsible for creating a unifying sense of the English nation when the uniformity of the language was in doubt becomes questionable.

The English language was unclear or mixed at its core. Shakespeare constantly brings this to the fore and uses it self-consciously, not with anxieties of mis-meaning but experimentally, with dialogue often deviating from the matter at hand to focus on the properties of language itself. The title-page of Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* refers to 'hard usuall English wordes', and as Emma Smith points out, labelling the English language as hard 'is an index of the extent to

¹⁰ Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (1994), and *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain* (2004), and David Baker and Willy Maley, eds. *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹ In the early modern period, error was associated with 'reform', and 'correction', and was drawn upon heavily in religious polemic during the reformation. Thus error has a strong religious component. This is discussed in this chapter with Spenser's representation of the Catholic serpent 'error'. Due to limitations of space the connections between error and sin in the reformation cannot be fully covered. This, however, will be a development of the thesis as a future project, see 'Conclusion'.

¹² Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, p. 11.

which a rapidly expanding English was developing as a foreign language even to its own native speakers...English was becoming a language which had to be learned': the very reason Cawdrey compiled his book.¹³ He teaches native people their own language, confirming the fears of Sidney and Florio (above) that the language and people will be severed from each other.

Smith argues that this sense of 'Englishness', to which Mazzio and others refer, is created through the image of the foreign other: '[t]hrough representing foreign characters in a London setting, and specifically through the representation of their accented English speech, the plays construct legible and recognizable fictions of both Englishness and non-Englishness in order to produce an idea of national identity.'¹⁴ These historical generalizations are correct in so far as national identity defines itself by what it is not, and in particular it is invaluable to understand English and Englishness in terms of what is foreign to it. But a more complex relation seems to exist between 'native' and 'non-native', as linguistically the 'native' bleeds into the 'foreign' as the lexicon expands; the boundary of 'English' and 'foreign' is hard to identify. Where, then, does this leave national identity? It has nothing to differentiate itself from, to define itself against. Claims of invasion or conquest suggesting victory and defeat of the kind employed by Florio and Sidney cannot be so straightforward. Although the Norman conquest would have secured the Gallic influence on the English language, its Latin and Anglo-Saxon heritage emphasise how dubious it can be to infer a sense of national identity from the English language. The myth of linguistic purity is already impure; native is already foreign.

¹³ Emma Smith, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 73.

¹⁴ Emma Smith, "'So much English by the Mother': Gender, Foreigners, and the Mother Tongue in William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money*", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol.13, 2001, 165-181, p. 165.

Expression can be found of the myth of purity at the end of the sixteenth century. As Janette Dillon points out, ‘England remained at war with Spain until after the accession of James, and also became involved in the French civil war after 1589. The construction of “England” remained firmly entrenched in the definition and exclusion of otherness, whether racial, religious or political.’¹⁵ Even if a Renaissance notion of ‘Englishness’ was constructed through exclusion of the ‘strange’, as in ‘stranger’, this did not seem to be the case for many users of the English language which, far from excluding, actively invited elements of other languages. By contrast, the critically-accepted theory maintains that ‘the rise’ of the vernacular effected in turn a sense of nationality which, at least according to Dillon, was successful through its exclusion of non-native elements. But seeing language as productive of a sense of nationhood is complicated by the fact that the English vernacular frequently adopted terms rather than refused their entry. The myth of purity labels foreign interpolation as dangerous, bad and wrong.¹⁶ Yet for those who seek to promote foreign borrowing such as Richard Mulcaster (see chapter three), the division of correct and incorrect language based on foreign and native words and speakers is troubling; indeed the sense that linguistic ‘error’ is to be corrected requires reassessment.

Jonathan Hope recognises the potential for an alternative perspective on error, stating that it ‘is an interesting notion in the Renaissance. To us, a linguistic error is straightforward – the ideology of standardization has established variation as error, and culturally, grammatical variants are identified as errors, despite what linguists might say – but there was no such ideology in the Renaissance, especially in relation to the vernaculars’.¹⁷ Hope argues that because of the instability of the vernacular,

¹⁵ Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 168-9.

¹⁶ See fn.1, this section.

¹⁷ Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare and Language: Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in the Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 2010), p. 36.

error and correction require a different conceptualisation from the current approach. He suggests that we now approach error with the impetus to correct because of a greater standardisation of the language.¹⁸ His way of considering error resists the myth of ‘pure’ language in its expansive inclusion rather than exclusion of difference. This is where the mother tongue becomes relevant, as it is not just a synonym for the vernacular but is employed to naturalise the vernacular. With the mother tongue the idea of the national purity of language is galvanised by its intersection with the rhetoric of ‘nature’. The national language is treated as ‘natural’ through the terminology of the mother tongue, appealing almost universally to those who are born in the nation and speak its language. Its ideology, then, excludes ‘erratic’ elements. Its vehicle is womanhood, specifically the mother’s body. The mother’s body can be seen as having at least two functions. First, at the material level, its child-bearing capacity is necessary to produce the next generation, thus preserving the state. Secondly, at the conceptual level, the mother’s tongue is used figuratively as a vehicle to pass on the national, natural language. The mother’s body is thereby rendered a contested site in that its appropriation at both the material and conceptual levels conflicts with female individuality, thus excluding women from power and ownership over a language, and more broadly a national future, that they are required to deliver.

¹⁸ In the context of this debate, then, what does ‘wrong’ language look like? Furthermore, if Shakespeare was strongly implicated in creating a sense of national identity through the rise of the vernacular, what are the effects of dramatizing ‘wrong’, mistaken, erratic English? A clear example of this is Mistress Quickly in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597) which is the first case study (1.1.2)

1.1.1.2 Natural Language

Thomas Cooper in his *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1584) defines the mother tongue as ‘Naturall speach’.¹⁹ In this chapter, I will explore four facets of ‘nature’ or ‘naturalness’ in relation to the mother tongue. First, the natural as biological, particularly in relation to the biological link between the mother and child. Second, the natural as innate or non-acquired. For example, natural speech is opposed to learned or man-made speech, as it is an innate capacity possessed from birth. Third, the natural as common or typical. The biological sense of naturalness also implies universality; in the case of the mother tongue this takes the form of a shared linguistic culture. This brings us to the fourth meaning, the natural as native, in which this shared linguistic culture is grounded in nationhood: the national language as an emblem of the national identity. This final category, as we will see, is paradoxically a constructed form of naturalness. The image of the mother tongue, with its suggestion of native linguistic culture, confers upon the early modern idea of national identity the authority of the natural.

The ‘mother tongue’ is a synonym for ‘natural language’. Anthony Gilby, in his admonition of the beguiling effects of foreign language, conflates the two: ‘we haue mistrusted your fayre wordes, and marked the mattier in our owne mother tonge and naturall language.’²⁰ Gilby emphasises the ‘mother tongue’ as natural to contrast with the unnaturalness of Roman Catholicism’s foreign constitution, its ‘darke termes whiche you do bringe furth of other languages’.²¹ John Cooke also contrasts natural language with foreign tongues onstage. In *The City Gallant* (1614), Staines declares ‘I am sir, a perfect Traueller, that haue trampled ouer The face of this

¹⁹ Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1584), at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 1 August 2011].

²⁰ Anthony Gilby, *An ansver to the deuillish detection of Stephane Gardiner*, 1548, Fol. LLvii at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 27 February 2013].

²¹ Gilby, *An ansver to the deuillish detection of Stephane Gardiner*, Fol. LLvii.

vneuerss and can speake Greeke and Latine as promptly, as my owne naturall Language'.²² Staines claims to have fluency equal to Latin and Greek, displaying his learning and perhaps making him a suspicious speaker, given that such facility has a tincture of unnaturalness, being of learned, artificial tongues. Both Staines and Cooke refer to their ownership over the 'natural language'. It defines their identities, in contrast with foreign tongues that are variously borrowed or gathered, which are external to the self, making Staines the 'perfect traveller' in walking abroad to learn them; he externalises his self to collect them whereas his natural language remains within.

The alignment of home with nature is used to contain women in the nation as well as the domestic space. In his description of English society, Thomas Smith perceives 'women, as those whom nature hath made to keepe home and to nourish their familie and children, and not to medle with matters abroad'.²³ The role of women is stereotypically in the home, but crucially this is justified natural determinism: the home/nation is the 'natural' place for women.²⁴ Conversely the fracturing of national identity is suggested through the unnatural division from the mother. Thomas Wilson claims that the use of inkhorn terms produces fundamental misunderstandings even between the closest of people: 'if some of their mothers were alive, thei were not able to tell what they say'.²⁵ The communication of members of the nation with each other is strained by the invasion of foreign

²² John Cooke, *Greenes Tu quoque, or, The citty gallant*, 1614, Sig. J4r. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 1 August 2011].

²³ Sir Thomas Smith, *De republica Anglorum* (1583), Dii.r., p. 19 at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 June 2012].

²⁴ As Thomas Docherty argues, 'not to know one's parents implies a lack of identity, and the loss of the centralised (paradisa) space or place in the "natural" house...this whole system depends first and foremost on women "knowing their place", and that place is to be the safely controlled position at the centre of a domestic arrangement.' Docherty, *On Modern Authority: the Theory and Condition of Writing* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p. 81.

²⁵ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), see *EEBO*, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 9 March 2011].

language. Wilson invokes the material/symbolic function of the mother, alluded to earlier, in his discussion of members of the nation conversing with their mothers: the individual mother would be confused by this kind of language as would the symbolic mother tongue by the citizen-child. Wilson's invocation of the natural relation between mother and child implies the unnaturalness of inkhornism. The theory of linguistic purity and natural language come together to debar foreignness through the symbol of the mother.²⁶

The dominant early modern distinction was between mother/natural against unnatural/foreign/learned. Steven Mullaney states that '[t]he voice of the Other, of the *barbaros*, sounded in the throat whenever the mother tongue was spoken; one's own tongue was strange yet familiar; a foreigner within, a quite literal internal *émigré*.'²⁷ He argues that before being taught a language one literally speaks one's mother's tongue which is a kind of invasion, a part of someone else residing within the self. This strange familiarity with the mother tongue is consonant with the idea of being born with a 'tongue', with one's language born at the moment of birth, existing within oneself, of not remembering learning to speak but always being able to, speaking out of oneself with another's tongue.²⁸ The invasion of the mother tongue, whilst providing identity through a shared, common language, at the same time removes the agency of the self: the mother can never be expelled. The mother tongue

²⁶ Edmund Spenser's 'E.K.' exploits the metaphorical associations of the 'mother tongue', attributing its 'barrenness' to the forgetting of 'naturall' English words. 'E.K.' claims that this poet 'hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightfull heritage such good and naturall English words, as haue ben long time out of vse & almost cleare disherited. VVhich is the onely cause, that our Mother tonge, [...] hath long time ben cou~red most bare & barreine [...] which default when as some endeuoured to salue & recure, they patched vp the holes with peces & rags of other languages'. Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender* (London, 1579), Sig. q.iii v. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 June 2013].

²⁷ Steven Mullaney, 'Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance' in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 65-92, p. 80.

²⁸ Latinate scholars showed that their allegiances lay elsewhere in using another language and replacing their mother-tongue. Forked tongues and double speak, the state of being bilingual, was one Shakespeare experienced, demonstrated in his knowledge of French in *Henry V*.

is not just an invaded language, made up of foreign parts; its habitation is one of ineradicable invasion of the self.

Despite the mother tongue and natural language being synonymous, the mother tongue is a supplement to nature.²⁹ The mother ties the vernacular inextricably to the nation, like an umbilical cord that anchors as well as nourishes. Yet this is subject to untying by foreign or wrong language which is already inherent (as discussed above with the myth of vernacular purity and in chapter two with linguistic ‘enfranchisement’). The mother tongue is called upon to stand for a notion of national self-sufficiency, wholeness and plenitude, that which is without dependence on anything exterior to itself, either nations, languages or national languages. Yet the pure mother tongue is in fact a bastardised, happy amalgam, a gallimaufry of other languages, and this inescapability gives rise to the yearning for the natural language that is mythologised through the mother as an analogue of nature in its bearing of life and in its function as originator. Within this myth we can perceive natural and national moving together. This maternal tying of nation and natural can be felt most strongly under politically pressurised conditions which reveal the ideological force behind the conception of nature. Quite straightforwardly, it is efficacious to represent the mother as natural where it is most necessary for this narrative to be convincing. This occurs when a woman ascends to the throne, when it becomes possible for her symbolic body to reify the metaphor of the mother of the nation.

²⁹ For a discussion of the supplement to nature, see Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, pp. 17-45.

1.1.1.3 *Queen Elizabeth: Mother of the Nation*

Elizabeth was presented and presented herself as the mother of the nation. In 1578, on Elizabeth's departure from Norwich a farewell oration was composed, describing her as 'the mother and nurse of this whole Common welth, and Countrie', and said of the citizens' distress at her departure, 'How lamentable a thing is it, to pul away sucking babes from the breastes and bosomes of their most louing mothers?'³⁰ The propagandist encomium presents Elizabeth as a breast-feeding mother to vulnerable infants doubling as ruler and citizens.³¹ Elsewhere, Anthony Munday refers to her as 'the most louing Mother and Nurse of all her good Subiectes';³² John Aylmer describes her as the 'natural mother your country of England'.³³ Helen Hackett interprets this as an ideological need for the mother. She discusses the idea that the same imagery of the Virgin Mary was used to represent Elizabeth. After removing Catholic Marian culture, Elizabeth fills the gap left by the mother figure: 'the idea has developed that Elizabeth became a sort of Protestant substitute for the Virgin Mary, filling a post-Reformation gap in the psyche of the masses, who craved a symbolic virgin-mother figure.'³⁴ Hackett herself seems to naturalise Elizabeth's rule through this theory, accepting that Elizabeth was indeed a yearned-for mother – the origin of her creation being the desiring child rather than clever self-fashioning that naturalised female rule.³⁵

³⁰ Bernard Garter and William Goldinham, *The Ioyfull Receyuing of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie into hir Highnesse Citie of Norwich* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578), Sig. F4v.-r. at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 April 2013].

³¹ The iconography surrounding Queen Elizabeth is diverse, complex and too large for full discussion here. For a replete survey see Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1995).

³² Anthony Munday, *A Watch-woord to Englande*, (1584), sig.A3, quoted in E C. Wilson, *England's Eliza* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 218.

³³ John Aylmer, *An harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiectes*, (1559), Sig. R.r. at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 April 2014].

³⁴ Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 7. Discussed in further detail in the 'Introduction', 1-12.

³⁵ Elsewhere Hackett argues that maternal imagery is used to naturalise female rule in the face of opposition to the monarch on sexist grounds from writers such as John Knox in his *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (1558).

Instead of adopting traditional masculine virtues of rule, her maternal clemency is stressed: ‘She commeth in lyke a lambe, and not lyke a Lyon, lyke a mother, and not lyke a stepdam’; she is ‘a louing Quene and mother to raigne ouer vs’.³⁶ Aylmer defines her characteristics as not leonine or aggressive; her figure as a mother is both authoritative and caring. Indeed the icon of the mother-queen was so compelling it is written on her tomb in Westminster Abbey: she is the ‘mother of this her country’. Both female monarchs at the end of the sixteenth century are represented as mothers at their deaths: on the tomb of Mary Queen of Scots is written ‘Great by marriage, greater by birth, but greatest by offspring, Here is buried the daughter, wife, and mother of kings.’ Mary’s inscription, however, exhibits as well as attempts to conceal an anxiety about what the mother will engender – a follower of a heretical religion, for example, a Roman Catholic. This imagery, which joins the mother and the nation, allowing the female monarch to become the ultimate mother of the nation provides the context for understanding the mother tongue. The ideological impetus that conflates the mother and the nation also seeks to embed a language in a nation, and presents a national language as a natural language.

Shakespeare also links the mother and nation, but it is notable that this linkage is not so straightforward and works to subvert rather than maintain the association between these concepts. He refers to ‘dear mother England’ through the voice of Philip the Bastard whose own paternity is illegitimate, discussion of which forms the matter of the first scene of *King John* (1594-6). He recognises that his origins are uncertain and places responsibility on the mother: ‘But wh’er I be as true begot or no, | That still I lay upon my mother’s head’ (I.1.75-6). King John ratifies this dubious blame, saying ‘if she play false, the fault was hers, | Which fault lies on

³⁶ Aylmer, *An harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiectes*, Sig.N4v., Q3v. at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 April 2014].

the hazards of all husbands | That marry wives.’ (I.1.118-20). Mothers are no longer caring and true, but always potentially adulterous and ‘faulty’. They ruin their sons: ‘my land, | Legitimation, name, and all is gone’ (I.1.247). This modulates the sense of Philip’s later speech where he patriotically condemns the French on behalf of the mother, which perhaps subtly suggests that he is fighting for a ‘faulty’ cause. The underlying meaning pertains to the play’s end with Philip’s final couplet: ‘Nought shall make us rue, | If England to itself do rest but true’ (V.7.117-8). Philip’s submission to the ‘lineal state and glory of the land’ and his faith in England’s truth seems suspicious when his own truth, his own history, is uncertain (V.7.101). It seems, then, that Shakespeare questions these common narratives of mother, language and nation more than he adheres to them.

To return to Philip’s reference to ‘mother England’, he says to Lewis the Dolphin of France

you degenerate, you ingrate revolts,
 You bloody Neroes, ripping up the womb
 Of your dear mother England, blush for shame;
 For your own ladies and pale-visaged maids
 Like Amazons come tripping after drums,
 Their thimbles into armed gauntlets change,
 Their needles to lances, and their gentle hearts
 To fierce and bloody inclination. (V.2.151-8)

He describes the massing French forces as rebelling against the English nation as mother, suggesting that the English is the mother to France as well. Their pugilism is cast as unnatural revolution. They are ‘bloody Neroes’, alluding to Nero who reputedly murdered then disembowelled his mother. In their rebellion against the mother country they are ‘ripping up the womb’ of the nation, disabling its ability to reproduce itself and aligning Nero’s gruesome matricide with war against the King. Such French conflict denaturalizes women twice over: first it disembowels the

mother, her insides ripped ‘up’ out of the soil of the country.³⁷ Then ‘ladies and pale-visaged maids’ become Amazonian warriors, turning their ‘gentle hearts’ to aggression and murder, and women against their own ‘natures’.

1.1.1.4 Cords and Tongues

Gendering the nation by describing it as ‘mother England’ evokes the unique, vital closeness between mother and child through which language is passed on, one of physical proximity and genetic replication, of one thing growing out of another, as Philip the Bastard suggests. The emblem of this link is the umbilical cord. It was otherwise known as the navel string in the early modern period. It anchors the child to the mother: it is a literal bond that is metaphorised to represent linguistic, familial and bodily closeness. This cord between the mother and child is directly related to the mother tongue, closely connecting speaking and birthing.³⁸ The handbook on birth *Child-birth or, The happy deliuerie of vvomen* (1612) states

Some do obserue, that the Nauell must be tyed longer, or shorter, according to the difference of the sexe, allowing more measure to the males: because this length doth make their tongue, and priuie membres the longer: whereby they may both speake the plainer, and be more seruiceable to Ladies. And that by tying it short, and almost close to the belly in females, their tongue is lesse free, and their naturall part more straite: And to speake the truth, the Gossips commonly say merrily to the Midwife; if it be a boy, Make him good measure; but if it be a wench, Tye it short.’³⁹

³⁷ Thomas Docherty explores the allegorisation of home, place and centre as the female body. Docherty, *On Modern Authority*, pp. 69-89.

³⁸ *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* explores in intricate detail the metaphors between birth and books. As Margreta de Grazia notes ‘The textual imprint as child recurs in preliminaries to early modern books, putting into play the semantics shared by biological and textual reproduction: of issue, generation, copying, duplication, multiplying, engraving and gravidity; of textual and sexual inscriptions that survive the grave through enduring ideas and successive children; of two types of lines, scripted and genealogical which promise to extend the parent/author beyond death.’ Margreta de Grazia, ‘Imprints: Shakespeare, Gutenberg and Descartes’, *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 29-58, p. 35. The volume does not, however, discuss the umbilical cord or its relation to language, either speech or printing.

³⁹ Jacques Guillemeau, (trans. unknown) *Child-birth or, The happy deliuerie of vvomen* (1612), p. 99, Sig.N2r.

The length at which the navel string is cut determines not just the length of the tongue but the skill in speaking, which is divided across the sexes. Leaving the umbilical cord long in men extends the length of the tongue and his ability to speak, as well as lengthening his penis and his ability to reproduce, to be 'more serviceable to ladies'. For men, speaking and having sex are both generative.

The midwife is commanded to encourage male virility when tying the umbilical cord, whereas she has the opposite duty with women. 'Tying it short' makes the tongue of women 'less free', literally either less able to speak or symbolically more restrained. A short tie makes straighter vaginas, which has a less obvious function. Perhaps it was thought to be beneficial to birth, or more likely to produce 'correct' children that are not crooked or supernatural. Just as the penis and tongue are both virile and fertile, female sexuality and speech is restrained. 'Straight' and 'plain' are the characteristics of choice, against the crooked errancy of figurative language, as discussed in chapter four. We can see the divided aims for speaking and the end of female speech: it was not to persuade or impress but to say less, even remain silent. This method of cutting and tying, said 'merrily' in the common tongue of the 'gossips', itself becomes part of the common tongue. A sexist approach to female speech, the restraint of both her tongue and sexuality, is proverbialized.

Patricia Parker has explored the significance of the bridled female tongue, contesting the representation of women as 'unflappable talkers'.⁴⁰ It is 'inseparable from the vice opposed to the corresponding virtue of Chastity as both are ranged against Obedience.'⁴¹ For Parker, the anxiety about the loose sexuality of Philip's mother is also an anxiety about the production of her speech. The link between

⁴⁰ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 26. In relation to Shakespeare's representation of bridling, see Lynda E. Boose, 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 179-213.

⁴¹ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 26.

garrulity and sexuality is expressed in the Scold's Bridle: 'in what it encloses and restricts, a kind of chastity belt for the tongue.'⁴² Shakespeare employs the image of the bridle in this way through the tongue of Cressida: 'My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown | Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fools! | Why have I blabbed?' (III.2.122). Cressida figures children as the reproductive product and through them the metaphor more explicitly equates female sexuality with unrestrained language. Cressida's thoughts have escaped her, leading her to speak incoherently: her excessive words are children, her thoughts and sexuality grown too large. This unruly speech is specifically female, as she continues 'I wished myself a man, | Or that we women had men's privilege | Of speaking first' (3.2.127-9). She is the first to confess her feelings for Troilus but without the 'privilege' of skill that enables clear, controlled, learned discourse. She hierarchises her own female language below that of men. Significantly, this is incompatible with the meaning of the mother tongue as previously discussed, which initially suggests that the vernacular is a property of women. Cressida's regret at her mis-speaking as her words wander forth aligns women's speech with error, disavowing them of the power they own symbolically with the mother tongue.

Shakespeare's use of the 'mother's tongue' teases out further gender divisions. In *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594-5), Moth appeals: 'my father's wit and mother's tongue assist me' (1.2.96). Findlay suggests that this reference supports a reading of 'rhetorical dexterity' as a female legacy, yet Moth's apostrophe is to male rhetorical skill. His mother gave him language which provided the tools to speak, but his father gave him wit which taught him how to make meaning, even clever meaning, from the words he has. The basic tools are a gift from the mother versus the

⁴² Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 27.

male bestowal of wit used to deploy them.⁴³ If rhetorical dexterity had been a maternal endowment then it would not have been so divided and Moth would have appealed to ‘my mother’s tongue and wit’. Wit, style and invention as something learned are male, spoken through a female tongue, a natural language, given through the universal biological link to the mother.

Shakespeare identifies ‘wit’ with artificial discourse: invention and judgement. Falstaff speaks of his own wit as ‘inventing’ comedy (I.2.10, *2 Henry IV*), and Hamlet claims that ‘Brevity is the soul of wit’ (II.2.91), both suggesting that wit is the capacity of appropriate expression, discipline and concision. Yet there is a type of wit that is unstylish in this manner, which belongs to women: ‘mother’s wit’. The *OED* defines it as ‘A person’s native or natural wit; common sense.’⁴⁴ What is ‘natural’ and ‘common’ opposes the stylish: it lacks the wit of Falstaff or Hamlet, which is of course a desirable attribute. Common sense may well be valuable in some respects but specifically in reference to the theatre, ‘mother wit’ is derogatory, associated with the vernacular, with low comedy.

The prologue to *Tamburlaine* announces:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay
We’ll lead you to the stately tent of War,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat’ning the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.⁴⁵

The prologue takes us on a journey. We begin with the ‘jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits’, which is the standard fare of the London theatres: familiar and uninventive, according to Christopher Marlowe. It promises to lead to ‘stately’ scenes with ‘high astounding terms’ – exciting and linguistically-inventive

⁴³ Findlay, *Women in Shakespeare*, p. 402.

⁴⁴ See *OED* <www.oed.com> [date accessed 10 November 2014].

⁴⁵ Prologue to *Tamburlaine*, 1–6, Christopher Marlowe, *‘Doctor Faustus’ and Other Plays*, eds. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

entertainment. Marlowe demonstrates his contempt for the obvious rhyme, rough metre and bawdy jokes of the popular theatre. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen comment that Marlowe ‘contrasts the high seriousness of his mirror for princes with the doggerel style and “clownage” of much popular theatre of his day.’⁴⁶ These are the critical extrapolations of ‘mother-wit’: clownish, doggerel, ordinary and common, rendered less than desirable. The commonality of the mother wit points towards its universality, but despite representing the shared experience of many it carries little status for Marlow. At the end of the sixteenth century there is a division between language that is elite, desirable, and authorised by male, artificial discourse, and that which is common, even rough, female and lower class.⁴⁷

In addition to wit, another relevant possession of the mother in the context of the theatre is the ‘womb’. Sir Walter Raleigh draws together drama and the mother tongue, suggesting that there may be a special relation between the mother tongue and the theatre:

What is our Life the play of passion
our mirth the Musick of Division
our Mothers wombes the Tyreing houses be
where we are drest for lives shorte comedie⁴⁸

This is a variation on the world-as-stage metaphor. The mother is positioned as the preparer. Her stereotypical role as nurturer is blended with backstage preparations in disguising the actor. As the stage is the place of speech, the mother prepares the actors with language, dressing their expression, nurturing the mother tongue.

Raleigh’s choice of genre here is interesting: the mother prepares for comedy,

⁴⁶ Bevington and Rasmussen, *‘Doctor Faustus’ and Other Plays*, p. 403.

⁴⁷ For more on the status of womens’ speech and stories, see Mary-Ellen Lamb, ‘Old Wives’ Tales, George Peele, and Narrative Abjection’ in *George Peele* ed. David Bevington (Farnham; Ashgate, 2011), pp. 191-206; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Walter Raleigh, ‘What is our Life?’ in *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh: a Historical Edition*, ed. Michael Rudick, (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 1999), 29C, p. 70.

reflecting Marlowe's sentiment of low comedy as female. The mother's womb 'dresses' the child in the vernacular, preparing it for the coarse, bawdy comedy of Mistress Quickly, implicitly preserving higher-status tragedy for a learned, male tradition.

Raleigh refers to 'mothers' in the plural, encompassing all actors/citizens. The individual parent is responsible for the child and in a larger symbolic sense, the mother as the property of the nation is taking responsibility for the citizens. His use of 'our' mothers suggest some kind of unified understanding, that mothers have the same role and tire the offspring in the same way. Raleigh draws upon two conceptions of naturalness here: natural as innate or non-acquired and natural as common or universal. Naturalness is inborn – it is a tongue acquired before birth, the endowment from the mother representing the close bond between her and the child. The naturalness of the 'mother tongue' requires shared origin. Valerie Traub argues that by virtue of the ineffable mystery of reproduction through the mother, every human beginning is always female: 'the maternal figure exists in our pre-natal memories...before knowledge of the father', before the enculturation of the infant 'who is expelled from this body into the social order, of the simultaneous development of its subjectivity, gender, and sexuality.'⁴⁹ Traub speaks of the imprimatur of the female mother upon the child, of the originality of the female figure. Yet this imprimatur, in the case of wit, takes a distinct and secondary form to its male counterpart. Wit in its male form is valuable, even though it is artificial, whilst in its female form it is rendered mundane and invisible even though it is a necessary and essential transmission of the vernacular. Male wit is an instrument that empowers the individual; female wit as 'a person's native or natural wit' represents

⁴⁹ Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 50.

exclusion.⁵⁰ As a native or innate form of wisdom, as non-artificial or non-learned, it is the wit with which women are left, having been excluded from the spheres in which male wit is attainable.

1.1.1.5 *Tongue Tied*

The navel, tongue and ‘privy members’ are three points aligned vertically on the body. One affects the other: they are interdependent. This image of the body highlights the relation between the tongue, the navel string and the genitalia. Tongues and navels share a special relation in both being bound. As the umbilical cord ‘ties’, rather than merely connects, so the mother tongue mirrors this relation and is inescapably tied to the citizen. Yet a tongue that is irresistibly connected is ‘tongue-tied’, a phrase that brings the idea of a natural, instinctive language into uncomfortable proximity with an inability to speak. The most ‘naturall’, native language given at birth is also the tongue that is most restrained. An image of the untied tongue appears in the world of *Richard II* describing the aged and dying paragon of eloquence, John of Gaunt: ‘His tongue is now a stringless instrument; | Words, life and all, old Lancaster hath spent’ (II.1.149-50), employing this same paradox, where only a strung-up tongue has the ability to speak.

Thomas Thomas includes the entry ‘ancyloglossum’ in his Latin to English Dictionary, defining it as ‘the disease called, tongue tied, speechlessness’.⁵¹ This is when the ‘fraenum’ is too short and severely restricts the movement of the tongue. The fraenum is ‘a small ligament or fold which restrains the motion of the tongue’, from the Latin meaning ‘bridle’ (see the discussion of the scold’s bridle in the

⁵⁰ Definition of ‘mother’s wit’, *OED* <www.oed.com> [date accessed 14 November 2014].

⁵¹ Thomas Thomas, *Dictionary linguarum Latinae et Anglicanae* (1587), see *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 July 2013]. Thomas Cooper defines ‘Anciloglossum’ as ‘The disease that we call tongue tyed’ *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (1578): <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 July 2013].

previous section).⁵² In the same text the figurative use of ‘tongue-tied’ occurs under ‘Atypus’: ‘A stammerer: one that is tonge tyed’, where being tongue-tied can more loosely apply to stumbling over words or having a speech impediment.⁵³ John Florio captures something of the potential linguistic play of being tongue-tied, reflecting the jumbling and mashing together of words in his definition of ‘Scilinguáto’ as ‘one that is tongue-tied. Also a stutter, a lisper, a stammerer, a maffler’.⁵⁴ To be tongue-tied in the Renaissance was not just to mix up words, to jumble them all together or to fall over them, thus stymying speech. It was a medical condition where a cord of the tongue is too short, causing it to be held to the floor of the mouth, resulting in indistinct speech. This was an inherited condition, a defect from the mother. The notion of a cord, as that which binds together, seems to be at the heart of the ties between the body and language. But through comparison of the umbilical cord and the fraenum, we see that cords are not merely language-giving ties to the mother. Whereas the umbilical cord, ‘transmits’ language to the child, the fraenum, through the phenomenon of tongue-tying, can hinder its use.

In *1 Henry IV* the construction of a tied tongue is feminised. Hotspur is reprimanded by Northumberland: ‘what a wasp-stung and impatient fool | Art thou to break into this woman’s mood, | Tying thine ear to no tongue but thine own!’ (I.3.236-8). Hotspur is ‘wasp-stung’, short-tempered and petulant—defined as a ‘woman’s mood’. This meaning of ‘wasp-stung’ resonates with Shakespeare’s later use of ‘waspish’ as a distinctly feminine characteristic to describe Katherina in *The*

⁵² See *OED* definition of ‘fraenum’ <www.oed.com> [date accessed 14 November 2014].

⁵³ See Thomas, *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae*, at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 July 2013].

⁵⁴ John Florio, *Queen Anna’s New World of Words* (1611), <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 1 August 2011].

Taming of the Shrew: ‘If I be waspish, best beware my sting’ (II.1.210).⁵⁵

Northumberland accuses Hotspur of listening to no one else but himself, but his exact construction here is significant. Hotspur ‘ties’ his ear to his own tongue, extending the metaphor of being ‘tongue-tied’, where the tongue is not just tied to itself but is attached to a different part of his body; the tongue is tied to the ear and the ear to the tongue, suggesting both speech and hearing are impeded. As they are attached to the same body, his own introspection leaves him unable to communicate. Northumberland’s metaphor signifies speech and listening at once. Hotspur’s female irascibility leads him to mishear and misspeak. He becomes tongue-tied by his anger at ‘this vile politician, Bolingbroke’, and his speech breaks down, becoming incoherent and populated with dashes, which suggest pauses, silence and broken, unfinished speech. He is unable to communicate, forgetting names, his speech becoming imprecise and full of oaths: ‘In Richard’s time,— what do you call the place?— | A plague upon it, it is in Gloucestershire’ (I.3.241-2). As a virile, active male rival to the throne, Hotspur’s speech clearly suggests that being tongue-tied is not just a feminine condition. The linguistic presentation, however, of verbal stumbling, especially in the history plays, is feminised, connecting it to discourses of the ‘mother tongue’ and the mother.

Elsewhere, the tied or hindered tongue has its masculine equivalent in the castle. Addressing King Richard, Thomas Mowbray says ‘Within my mouth you have engaol’d my tongue, | Doubly portcullis’d with my teeth and lips’ (I.3.167, *Richard II*). His inability to argue his case against banishment is caused by the body’s natural barriers, his teeth and lips, which contain the tongue. It is ‘doubly

⁵⁵ Ben Jonson’s male character ‘Wasp’ in *Bartholomew’s Fair* suggests that ‘waspish’ behaviour is not exclusively gendered female, but Hotspur is explicitly described as being in a ‘woman’s mood’. See Ben Jonson, *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, eds. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 4.

portcullis'd' first through Richard's pre-emptory condemnation and secondly through his 'teeth and lips' which are also a pair of barriers. Yet although his tongue is 'engaol'd' inside his mouth, it is not tied but loose: 'now my tongue's use is to me no more | Than an unstringed viol or a harp' (I.3.161-2). The restrained tongue that creates valuable speech is entirely relaxed in Mowbray's mouth to become 'unstringed'. Grasping around to find the right words he returns to his childhood, but fails to find them there: 'I am too old to fawn upon a nurse' (I.3.170). The nurse, as a wet nurse or caring woman, is suggestive of the mother tongue. His loss of the mother-figure and his natural tongue occurs together; the tie to the mother tongue through the symbolic navel string and the tie of the tongue to the mouth are both severed. He declares that 'My native English, now I must forgo', invoking the necessity of the mother and the bound tongue for speaking (I.3.160). The loss of his 'native English' is contextualised by the threat of banishment. To leave the country is also to lose the mother, which leads to indistinct or mistaken speech. The loss of the speaker's bond to the mother coincides with the unstrung or hindered tongue; it leads the speaker into the distinctive error of mistaken or misshapen speech.

In *The Direction for the Government of the Tongue* (1593), William Perkins recognises the same type of linguistic restraint as Mowbray's portcullis: 'The tongue is placed in the middle of the mouth, and it is compassed in with lippes and teeth as with a double trench, to shewe us, howe we are to use heede and preconsideration before we speake'.⁵⁶ Rather than a castle the tongue is 'compassed', meaning encircled with a 'double trench', connoting a defensive fortification, making speech a battle. As does Mowbray, Perkins symbolises the facial apparatus as a defensive, static structure, distant from Cressida's chaotic and unruly children who have a bridle

⁵⁶ William Perkins, *The Direction for the Government of the Tongue* (1593), p. 11 at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 July 2013].

rather than stone to restrain them; her image of speech is much more vulnerable to excess and loss. Contrary to Parker who associates the tongue's bridle exclusively with women, it also applied to men. Giacomo Affinati (1605) wishes for more male bridles: 'Oh in how many perilles, and in how many narrowe straytes, doth hee finde himselfe, that hath no bridle for his tongue...?'⁵⁷ A bridle defends against the 'perilles' of speech for men as well as women. Unrestrained speech as a negative construct, the 'unflappable talkers', are not always gendered female: the restraint of the male tongue is just as important. Yet the imagery through which this is conveyed *is* gendered: children for women, war for men, fulfilling the stereotypical roles of men as defenders of the home and women as nurturers within it. Furthermore, Parker is correct in highlighting the punishment and shaming of uncontrolled female speech in the figure of the scold or shrew, whereas for men there was no such consequence.

This first section of the chapter has examined the early modern context of the mother tongue: the meaning and usage of that phrase as a synonym for vernacular English, its promixity to error and its co-option by nationalist rhetoric that seeks to conflate it with 'natural language', which naturalises the position of women away from the power and control of that language. In such writing, the mother tongue is tied to the nation, imagery that is employed with Elizabeth I as the mother of the nation. In order to establish what the mother tongue looks like in the mouths of women I will now focus on some case studies to explore how they use it and how successfully, whether it is restrained, correct and proper, or unbridled, excessive and erratical. The first is Mistress Quickly in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and her counterpart, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both women are representations of the mother tongue in

⁵⁷ Giacomo Affinati, *The dumbe diuine speaker* (1605), p. 24, at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 29 September 2012].

the mouth of the gossip: they chatter and speak excessively, using language in wrong or non-standard ways. The second case study is of Queen Margaret from *3 Henry VI* who is ambivalently represented by the men around her as both powerful and weak in her eloquence. The third case study is of Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*. His reference to his own 'womb' full of tongues takes the concept of the mother tongue in a different direction. His bellyful of multiple tongues evokes plural, deceptive, equivocal language and his status as a pregnant man denaturalises the national language that was previously entirely female. Edmund Spenser develops this concept of unnatural language with his character Error in 'The Faerie Queene', manifesting the misogyny that often resides beneath the surface of early modern representations of female speech. Shakespeare and Spenser work against the natural or conventional triangular relationship of the concepts 'mother', 'nation' and 'language'.

1.1.2. Case Studies

1.1.2. Case Study 1 - Gendered Error: The Nurse and Mistress Quickly

Both Mistress Quickly and the Nurse represent vulgar versions of the 'mother tongue' which seem to be at odds with 'correct' language. Quickly, as an English user, comically makes constant mistakes through her ignorance of Latin. English and Latin are positioned in conflict, the national language battling with classical learning. Shakespeare associates women with English, and Latin as the learned, artificial male tongue, taught in schools only to boys. The Latin world is positioned as male, beyond female, vernacular understanding. Walter Ong states that '[g]enerally speaking, it is boys alone who are taught in Renaissance schools, or who are given a systematic formal education', arguing that learning Latin in the Renaissance was a male puberty

rite.⁵⁸ In Act IV Scene I of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare undermines the cultural status of Latin as a male language and presents an even more vagrant version of English.

The conceit of the scene is that Mistress Quickly simply does not understand Latin. She is excluded from the all-male recitations of the schoolboy Will and schoolteacher Hugh Evans' Latin lesson, a stranger to the discourse. Instead of remaining silent she frequently interrupts the translation, wildly guessing what the Latin means. On one level she represents those to whom this kind of pedagogy is unknown, where Latin seems an alien world, and the only response is to hear it through English, the common language. She says: 'Remember, William, focative is *caret* And that's a good root', confusing the sound of '*caret*' with carrot (IV.1.52-3). Patricia Parker perceives knowledge and ignorance of Latin as a gendered division: Mistress Quickly responds with 'tattlings' and 'prabbles' because she is female (IV.1.26, 50), while Evans is supposedly in control of the language and the scene. His failure to perfect either Latin or English ironises his position as corrector.⁵⁹ Yet even if Shakespeare is mocking it, Latin undoubtedly carries value and status. Parker terms it the 'master tongue', as the language of men and power against women who deal in the vernacular (the mother tongue).⁶⁰ This gendering of the vernacular is supported by the linguistic variant 'mother's tongue' which came into use around this period and renders explicit, through the use of the possessive apostrophe, the ownership of the vernacular by women.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Walter Ong, 'Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite' in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Apr., (1959), 103-124, p. 106.

⁵⁹ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, pp. 27-31.

⁶⁰ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 29.

⁶¹ First used in 1517, according to the *OED*, see entry on 'mother's tongue' at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 14 November 2014]. For more on the mother tongue in Renaissance drama other than Shakespeare see Smith, "'So much English by the Mother'", 165-181.

This reading of Latin as the ‘master tongue’, however, is complicated by the characterisation of those who speak it. The Latin that appears in the scene (even from the lips of linguistic authority, the male schoolmaster) is often incorrect. The logic of Evans’s questioning is disjointed. He demands of William the translation of words from English to Latin, and then the declension of a case, which William gives as ‘*hic, haec, hoc*’ (IV.1.41). Evans mangles this in repetition: ‘*hig, hag, hog*’ (IV.1.42), undermining his own pedagogical authority through mis-pronunciation, presumably because he is Welsh. Mistress Quickly adds to this whirl of confusion by exclaiming that “‘Hang-hog” is Latin for bacon, I warrant you’ (IV.1.49). The scene parodies the humanist education system by presenting an ill-spoken scholar, who frequently calls Mistress Quickly ‘’oman’ instead of woman and pronounces v as f: ‘focative’ instead of vocative (rendering ‘fuckative’ which Mistress Quickly certainly hears) (IV.1.52). William is an unwilling child who does not look up eagerly for instruction but reluctantly bows his head in fear and has to be cajoled into his lesson: ‘Come hither, William; hold up your head; come Come on, sirrah; hold up your head. Answer your master, be not afraid.’ (IV.1.19-20).

The scene seems to pit Latin against English, and Mistress Quickly’s mistakes or malapropisms determine her tongue as vagrant in its undermining of Latin translation.⁶² It is through these ‘errors’ in translation that this image of the uneducated mother tongue is represented against male Latin humanist training, beginning in school. Will’s wobbly translation from Latin to English and back to Latin gives ‘a stone’ for *lapis* and ‘a pebble’ for a stone (IV.1.31-4). Learning by rote

⁶² Thomas Docherty argues that comedy is a realisation of doubts about identities and essential natures, but a refusal to worry about them. The only way to “talk” or assume authority is through an even more radical kind of “stutter”. . . In this response there is no credence in a continuing genealogy in which we have a language which accords with nature as some kind of inherent blood-right.’ Docherty, *On Modern Authority*, p. 198. The comic responses, then, of Mistress Quickly are a rejection of the genealogical myth of the mother tongue.

is what is expected: marking and joining two terms of different languages for the sake of learning. Yet Will's translation is not self-contained and two terms become three, possibly more without Evans' sharp correction: 'No; it is *lapis*. I pray you remember in your prain' (IV.1.36). The translation is unable to move seamlessly between languages through precise definition; it lets in more terms, deviating from perfect equivalence.⁶³ Parker states that 'Latin returns not to Latin, in a faithful homogenous rendering, but rather escapes into meanings that betray their original, wandering too far afield to be called back or reined in.'⁶⁴ 'Betrayal' is an interesting word in this context: it is a revelation of origin in the process of jettisoning it, much as the 'mother tongue' is betrayed in Latin education, in learning another, artificial tongue. Significantly, Parker characterises the translation as 'wandering' rather than incorrect. Understanding Mistress Quickly as merely an uneducated fool or perceiving her more complex linguistic gymnastics turns upon the interpretation of 'error'. Indeed, her comic errors have often not been critically valued. Northrop Frye dismisses the scene as irrelevant, 'dragged in merely to fill up time'.⁶⁵ This disregards the system of substitution, pun and exchange, where the boundary between 'incorrect' language and language expanding through gathering meaning is constantly tested.

In the way that her meaning expands, so does the amount of her speech and this is another way that her language is in error. She is characterised as a loquacious gossip, her speech wandering and improper. She dilates, confusingly at times, saying

⁶³ This seems to be precisely what is happening in word books at the time, where several words are given for another, opening up more questions of definition. In his *Table Alphabeticall*, for 'eschew' Cawdrey gives 'shunning, avoid, escape', all different from 'eschew' and different again from each other. See *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 20 June 2013]. Words are not closed off with certainty; the system of similar words, cognates and synonyms is open-ended and unresolved as connections seem to proliferate without being pinned down.

⁶⁴ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 118.

⁶⁵ Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 36.

a lot but conveying little. The following quotation, though lengthy, is worth giving in full as it demonstrates her length and style of speech. She says to Falstaff,

Marry, this is the short and the long
 of it: you have brought her into such a canaries as
 'tis wonderful. The best courtier of them all, (when
 the court lay at Windsor), could never have brought
 her to such a canary; yet there has been knights,
 and lords, and gentlemen, with their coaches; I
 warrant you, coach after coach, letter after
 letter, gift after gift; smelling so sweetly, all musk,
 and so rushling, I warrant you, in silk and gold,
 and in such alligant terms, and in such wine and
 sugar of the best and the fairest, that would have
 won any woman's heart; and, I warrant you,
 they could never get an eye-wink of her. (II.2.59-71)

She tells 'the short and long of it' in terms of length but does not get to the point.

This extract consists only of two sentences, the second especially long and repeatedly extending itself with the conjunction 'and'. She describes how Mistress Ford has been brought into 'such a canaries' – an unclear phrase. She digresses with a parenthetical aside: '(when the court lay at Windsor)' which appears to add little to the sense. Her mistakes only add to the confusion of her meaning: she says 'rushling' instead of rustling and 'alligant' instead of elegant. Her style of emphasis and exaggeration slows her down: 'coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift'. She is prolix without adding meaning. Falstaff is wary of this in his response: 'But what says she to me? Be brief, my good she-Mercury' (II.2.79-80). He is confused by her speech; his subject 'she' could either be Mistress Ford or Quickly herself, suggesting that he understands nothing of what she has said. By calling her a 'she-Mercury' he refers ironically to Mercury's rapidity, drawing attention to her winding verbosity.

The model of Mistress Quickly is rehearsed in the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.

She is also a garrulous character, in the sense of the Latin *garrire*, to chatter or

prattle. Like Quickly, she often mistakes words or perhaps pronounces them differently, for example using 'Beshrow' and then varying to 'beshrew' six lines later as if she knew the correct word all along (III.5.221-7).⁶⁶ Act One Scene Three repeats the structure of three characters, one giving instruction, one receiving, with a chattering woman interrupting with inanities, apparently unable to stop talking. Speaking without straightforward logic, her meanings are slippery and punned and she is chastised for it, first by Lady Capulet, then by Lord Capulet in a later scene. Lady Capulet says 'Enough of this, I pray thee hold thy peace' to the Nurse's extended speech. Perhaps recognising that she has said too much, she promises 'Peace, I have done', only to commence interrupting Lady Capulet and Juliet's interchange about the eligibility of Paris (I.3.49, 59).

Capulet, as the absolutist head of the family, represents the correcting 'master tongue', claiming of his daughter 'I think she will be rul'd | in all respects by me' (III.4.13-4). In the next scene Juliet importunes her father as he orders her to marry Paris: 'I beseech you on my knees, | Hear me with patience but to speak a word' (III.5.158-9). She begs him to grant audience to her single 'word', her morsel of speech, but he refuses. The Nurse steps in to defend her with unbidden mis-speech, chastising Capulet with the retort 'you rate her so', clipping berate to 'rate' (III.5.168). Capulet cuttingly replies 'And why, my Lady Wisdom?' sarcastically defining her as an ignorant irrelevance. Yet the Nurse, at least in the beginning of the play, occupies a place of knowledge and status in her propensity to close scenes with pithy lines. She steals the rhyming couplet from Lady Capulet who only manages the penultimate line 'We follow thee. Juliet, the County stays'. The Nurse offers more memorable advice: 'Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days' (I.3.104-5). Similarly

⁶⁶ This could be compositorial error but either way, it demonstrates the difficulty of dealing with 'error', of processing and understanding it.

she dominates the final couplet in her next scene: ‘Anon, anon! | Come let’s away, the strangers all are gone’ (I.5.144-5).

Capulet continues his rebuke of the Nurse, still dripping in irony: ‘Hold your tongue, | Good Prudence, smatter with your gossips, go’ (III.5.170-1) – ‘smatter’, rhyming with chatter, means to talk without proper knowledge. At this serious moment when her language is challenged the Nurse’s reply is instantly short and direct, robbed of its loquacity. She and Capulet sharply exchange in stichomythia, completing the versified lines together, proving the opposite of the Nurse’s prating.

<i>Nurse.</i>	I speak no treason.	
<i>Cap.</i>	O, God-i-goden!	
<i>[Nurse.]</i>	May not one speak?	
<i>Cap.</i>	Peace, you mumbling fool!	(III.5.172-3)

Classically, the speakers would take up the other’s words and it is the Nurse who asks the formally constructed question ‘May not one speak?’, while Capulet employs the colloquial oath ‘O, God-i-goden!’ Despite contrary evidence, the Nurse’s speech is characterised as imperfect, as indistinct and incorrect mumbling. The Nurse, like Madge Mumblecrust in Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister* (1556), lacks teeth.⁶⁷ She says of her teeth ‘And yet, to my teen be it spoken, I have but four’ (I.3.13). ‘Teen’ is glossed in *The Riverside Shakespeare* as ‘sorrow’.⁶⁸ The Nurse is sorrowful when others comment on her teeth, but it is possible that her ‘teen’ refers to her trouble in speaking. Through the relation between her teeth and her speech, she represents a vulgar version of the ‘mother tongue’ which is at odds with ‘correct’ language.

English, when spoken by women such as the Nurse and Quickly, is wrong and comic, against a tradition of male Latin and correct speech. These are instances

⁶⁷ Mazzio discusses this play extensively in *The Inarticulate Renaissance* (pp. 56-94) and it would be well worth writing a comparison of the three plays if space allowed.

⁶⁸ Shakespeare uses it in this sense in *Richard III*: ‘And each hour’s joy wrack’d with a week of teen’ (IV.1.96).

of the mother tongue in the mouth of women, as comically bad and in need of correction, but in the case of Quickly Shakespeare declines to adhere to this model, given that the Schoolmaster's linguistic skills are also faulty. In this way, Shakespeare satirises the ritual of error and correction. The first case study argued that women's language is presented as wrong for comic effect, situated within a conflict between the natural, uneducated tongue and educated, artificial Latin. The next case study focuses on speech through the mother, ambiguously figured as both powerfully eloquent and weak.

1.1.2 Case Study 2 - The Mother's Tongue

'Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands, | For well I wot, thou hast thy mother's tongue', says Richard, later Richard III, insulting Prince Edward in *3 Henry VI* (1590-1).⁶⁹ For Shakespeare, the relation between one's native language and the mother is concrete. Edward became his mother as he spoke: 'there thy mother stands'. Richard is responding to Edward's proclamation that 'If that be right which Warwick says is right, | There is no wrong, but every thing is right.' (II.2.131-2). Richard passes negative judgement on Edward's words by labelling them as female: vague and without substance, in a world of war and male aggression. Edward's sentence expresses a profound contingency. If Warwick is wrong then everything is wrong, but equally everything could be right. He is equivocal, literally equal-tongued, and his totalising remark that 'There is no wrong, but every thing is right' is ambivalent to the point of being meaningless.

Yet his speech is not so straightforwardly vapid. His two lines are formal, riddling and rhetorical, repeating the word 'right' three times and exposing the logic

⁶⁹ Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, II.2.134, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

of his sentence by using conditional reasoning, framed by the construction ‘if...then...’. He interrupts the acerbic, hate-filled dialogue between the Yorkists and Lancastrians with a change in style, contrasting with the linguistic battle that mirrors the physical War of the Roses:

Rich. Are you there, butcher? O, I cannot speak!
Clif. Ay, crook-back, here I stand to answer thee,
 Or any he the proudest of thy sort
Rich. ‘Twas you that kill’d young Rutland, was it not?
Clif. Ay, and old York, and yet not satisfied (II.2.95-9)

Richard’s claim that Edward has his ‘mother’s tongue’ suggests that in speaking English you not only speak the national language but you speak through your mother, with her voice and identity that here challenges Edward’s own. The mother is in service to the nation and the child. Speaking through her adopts (or is in danger of adopting) female weakness. Edward speaking with his ‘mother’s tongue’ can be interpreted in two contrary ways, correlating to separate connotations of ‘mother’ that determine it as abuse or compliment.

The ambiguity of this label is compounded by textual indeterminacy or error. In the First Folio it is not Richard who claims, with all the vitriol of the enemy, that Edward speaks with his ‘mother’s tongue’, but Warwick, whose speech in this scene situates him between the warring factions. These lines are given to Richard in the Octavo of 1595 and the Quartos of 1600 and 1619,⁷⁰ all considered inferior to the ‘only authoritative text’ of the Folio, yet these words are still assigned to Richard in modern editions.⁷¹ Significantly the scene itself is not filled with textual variance which would otherwise support the claim for emendation.⁷² In the mouth of

⁷⁰ See Q1 (1595), Q2 (1600), and Q3 (1619) of *3 Henry VI* at British Library Treasures, <<http://www.bl.uk/treasures>>, [accessed 20 July 2011].

⁷¹ G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 744.

⁷² There is only one other moment where it is uncertain who is speaking: between Edward and Clarence. The Second Folio allows Edward to continue speaking but the First Folio gives these lines to Clarence: ‘Since when his oath is broke; for as I hear, | you that are king, though he do wear the

Warwick, the reference to the ‘mother’s tongue’ completely changes and potentially means almost the opposite when spoken by Richard. Women are no longer ‘soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible’; the mother is reimagined and her tongue is strong (I.4.141). The ambiguity of the concept ‘mother tongue’ means that neither textual variation is obviously incorrect: because the phrase has contradictory meaning it fails to stabilise the printed text, leaving it uncertain whether Richard speaks of weakness or Warwick speaks of strength.

The characterisation of Edward’s mother is important in determining ‘mother’s tongue’ as abuse or compliment. The Prince has his mother’s tongue, a Queen who completely controls her weak husband and commands armies. In the first scene, King Henry agrees on his death to disinherit his own son and pass the crown to Richard Duke of York under pressure from his rival’s claim to the throne (I.1.192-200). After this has been agreed Margaret enters the scene in such a rage that the nobles flee and even Henry tries to leave. She chastises his decision severely, calling him a ‘timorous wretch’, claiming ‘Had I been there, which am a silly woman, | The soldiers should have toss’d me on their pikes, | Before I would have granted to that act’ (I.1.243-5). Sarcastically exploiting her own position of feminine ‘weakness’, she verbally divorces him, denouncing their marriage and their bed before taking her son and her army to fight the battle her husband refused. The first Act is dominated by Margaret and in the final scene she and Clifford each take a knife and stab the Duke of York to death in a climax of female power. She proves herself to be the more bloodthirsty of the two, gruesomely crying ‘Off with his head, and set it on York gates, | So York may overlook the town of York.’ (I.4.179-80).

crown, | Have caused him, by new act of Parliament, | To blot out me and put his own son in.’ (II.2.89-92). The *Norton Shakespeare* deems this textual variant too insignificant to mention. See ‘Textual Variants’ in *Richard Duke of York*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), p. 368.

After Warwick (or Richard's) reference to her 'mother's tongue', she speaks next, aiming a rush of dark, malevolent imagery at Richard, displaying her eloquence:

Q. Mar. But thou art neither like thy sire nor dam,
 But like a foul misshapen stigmatic,
 Mark'd by the destinies to be avoided,
 As venom toads, or lizards' dreadful stings. (II.2.135-8)

As Alison Findlay notes, '[f]emale tongues are credited with the power to poison, tempt and deceive' and Margaret's voice fits into this frame as one 'whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth' (I.4.112).⁷³ Yet Margaret's tongue is poisonous, strong and aggressive and all these characteristics seem to be surplus to the eloquence by which her 'mother's tongue' is defined, which contrasts with the faulty vernacular of Mistress Quickly with her mis-hearings and mistakes, her 'tattlings' and 'prabbles'. Precisely how to define Shakespeare's use of the 'mother's tongue' is problematic: with Mistress Quickly it is tangled up with issues of weakness and female subjugation, but in the earlier play Margaret shows flashes of womanly strength and power, as well as drawing upon curses and witchcraft. This is a notable shift. The mother tongue, that is a natural and naturalising symbol, one that creates a sense of national identity derived from the nation's linguistic origins, now becomes supernatural. Margaret's malevolent speech is an example of the mother tongue in the mouth of the female. For the mother tongue to be figured as powerful it cannot appeal to the natural. Instead, it is pushed into the realm of the supernatural, that of curses, witchcraft and deceit. Since the mother tongue, as we have seen, is co-opted for the construction of a state identity, powerful female language cannot be contained within it, for this would be symbolically to empower women in the construction of national identity.

⁷³ Alison Findlay, *Women in Shakespeare: A Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 401.

1.1.2 Case Study 3 - Unnatural Tongues: A Bellyful

It is not just the powerful female voice that Shakespeare portrays as unnatural.

Another unnatural motif is the male mother tongue, represented by Falstaff's claim that 'I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine' (IV.3.18-20, *2 Henry IV*, 1598). Shakespeare transexualises the mother tongue, pushing an idea that is delimited as female onto a male character.⁷⁴ The 'mother tongue' as distinctly female is inverted, where the unique ability to birth language, to pass it on biologically and physically through the mother is appropriated as something male.⁷⁵ Falstaff's educated tongues sit in his belly, suggested by his 'school' of tongues. They are figured as natural, mother tongues, yet they are inherently unnatural, even monstrous, given the plurality of tongues and his inability to birth them.⁷⁶

Falstaff says:

I have a whole school of tongues in this belly
of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other
word but my name. And had I but a belly of any
indifferency, I were simply the most active fellow
in Europe. My womb, my womb, my womb undoes me. (IV.3.18-22)

His linguistic excessiveness is signified by his large belly, suggesting he is a slovenly, greedy consumer of far too much food and even more alcohol. Yet his lightness with language, his verbal speed, jars with his heavy, lumbering belly and his description as 'this huge hill of flesh' (*1 Henry IV* II.4.285). He disguises his

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the male mother see Suzanne Penuel, 'Male Mothering and *The Tempest*' in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, eds. Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn McPherson, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 115-30.

⁷⁵ Valerie Traub reads Falstaff's reference to his womb biologically as defined specifically by its uniquely female ability to reproduce. See 'Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (Winter, 1989), 456-474.

⁷⁶ For an early modern exploration of the triangulation between 'lingua', 'tongue' and 'language' in drama, see Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua* (1607). Nurturing Falstaff's own tongues, especially regarding his reference to his 'school' of tongues, suggests the tongues could be foreign languages, increasing Falstaff's volubility through his multilingualism. There is a collision between the mother tongue, foreign tongues, linguistic difference and error.

quick-wit and pregnancy of linguistic meaning with his rotund shape, dissimulating his identity. He appears as a mother of tongues, playing on the ‘mother’s tongue’ and the mother tongue. Perhaps the many tongues that are inside him are foreign tongues cultivated by ‘schooling’, further mangling the image of the natural mother tongue.⁷⁷ Presentation of Falstaff in this way expresses male desire to control and father the mother tongue. Falstaff, as one of Shakespeare’s characters most adept in handling words, represents this conflict between women as the carrier of the language and men who wish to authorise it.

Falstaff claims that he gestates multiple tongues which contribute to his linguistic ability. Yet his speech is often cryptic. He says of his belly full of tongues: ‘not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name’ (IV.3.19-20, *2 Henry IV*). The meaning of this is obscure; his speech at this point is difficult to interpret and verges on incoherence. Perhaps the tongues that speak nothing but his name refer to his unrestrained egoism, his inexorable need to channel his powers into nothing other than the service of his base desires. This would make sense of his subsequent remark that he would be ‘the most active fellow in Europe’ if his belly was indifferent, presumably to his desire for food, drink and self-preferment. His laxity of linguistic meaning mirrors his morality: his dangerous wandering tongue and his leading Prince Henry astray. As Hal says, ‘these humble considerations make me out of love with my greatness’ (II.2.11-2). His time in Eastcheap and his lowly companions are his ‘humble’ surroundings, as in his own words, he transforms from ‘a prince to a prentice’ (II.2.174). He looks forward to a time after his gaming with Falstaff, saying ‘So, when this loose behaviour I throw off’ (*1 Henry IV*, I.2.208). His behaviour and language are ‘loose’, containing associations of being

⁷⁷ Or perhaps they are different ways of speaking, various forms of address, to different characters – kings and peasants, or in different genres, comic or tragic.

unrestrained, dangerous and restless. There is certainly no portcullis or bridle controlling Falstaff's tongue, his dissidence drawing in Hal and threatening Kingly succession; he has 'misled the youthful prince' (I.2.144).

Shakespeare conceptually ties language to pregnancy, where Falstaff is breeding tongues in his own womb. 'Womb' in the early modern period held several senses, one being 'uterus', another being 'stomach', the latter meaning subsequently lost.⁷⁸ Colin MacCabe argues that the use of 'womb' here contributes to the subversive power of Falstaff's character and that 'we should not be surprised at Falstaff's consequent sexual ambiguity'.⁷⁹ Peter Barry disagrees on the fundamental ground that a word cannot mean two things at once, even when it historically supports two different readings. Although a word 'may have two or more "available" meanings, when used the context usually eliminates all but one of them.'⁸⁰ But recourse to the context offered either by language or Falstaff's character only complicates the attempt to determine a single meaning between stomach and uterus where, as MacCabe argues, Falstaff represents not just a threat to political representation but to representation itself because his dialogue is so frequently obscure.⁸¹

Regarding the context, the interpretation of womb as either stomach or uterus turns upon whether Falstaff's innards digest or breed. The nurturing 'school' of tongues connotes children and education, hinting at a parental rather than consuming

⁷⁸ See *OED* at <www.oed.com> [accessed 20 July 2011].

⁷⁹ Colin MacCabe, *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 116. Feminist criticism has laid claim to this speech. Patricia Parker names Falstaff as a 'fat lady' (*Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 20). She reads Falstaff's 'belly' full of tongues as making him more feminine rather than the mother tongue more masculine: the breeding and nurturing of language, of 'tongues', as being claimed by men. See Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, pp. 20-2. Valerie Traub notes that the large amount of references draw attention to Falstaff's belly which becomes 'increasingly feminized'. See Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 57.

⁸⁰ Peter Barry, 'The Limitations of Stylistics' in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 38, No. 3, (July 1988), 175-89, p. 176. As a method of reading, Barry's approach seems fundamentally unable to deal with ambiguity; he can only eradicate it.

⁸¹ MacCabe, *Theoretical Essays*, p. 117.

function. Thus the womb is the thing that ‘undoes’ his masculinity. As a grossly fat character, whose body ‘lards the lean earth as he walks along’ (II.2.109), his belly is a visual pun on pregnancy, supporting the reading that his reference to his own womb is a feminised stomach capable of growing and birthing, rather than a seat of gluttony.⁸² Falstaff’s paternalism—as a substitute father figure towards Hal—is extended in a maternal sense by engendering his own offspring, which are tongues and language rather children.⁸³ Shakespeare’s representation of the mother tongue – here meaning Falstaff’s mothering of his bellyful of tongues – overturns the common assumption that it describes natural and native language: it is unnatural, plural, foreign and educated.

1.1.2 Case Study 4 - The Mother Tongue and Errour

Falstaff’s ambiguous womb threatens the state: Hal is led astray from his princely responsibility by Falstaff’s influence, by his willingness to subvert the natural order. Another contemporary representation of the mother tongue that is even more threatening and disturbing is ‘Errour’ in Edmund Spenser’s ‘The Faerie Queene’. It was first published in 1590, at the same time as Shakespeare wrote the *Henry VI* trilogy (1590-1), and was revised and reprinted in 1596 at the same time as Shakespeare was imagining the male mother tongue through Falstaff in both parts of *Henry IV* (1596-8). Spenser’s mother tongue overturns the image of the protective, nurturing mother who represents language. He turns what is potentially dangerous in Falstaff into a terrible, Catholic female snake-tongue, situating the symbol within a

⁸² Cf. *Printing and Parenting*, ed. Brooks.

⁸³ Lisa Jardine links female copious fertility with a threatening female sexuality. See Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), p. 131. This threatening female sexuality seems to be displaced onto Falstaff through his curious androgyny, his ‘whole school’ of tongues also borrowing the sense of his teeming fertility. Parker draws this out, comparing the massive body of Nell in *The Comedy of Errors* with Falstaff who share certain characteristics of their description: he is a ‘hill of flesh’ (II.4.285, *1 Henry IV*) and she is a ‘mountain of mad flesh’, (IV.4.154, *Comedy of Errors*).

Reformation discourse. This recreated image of the mother tongue is far distant from its use on title pages that straightforwardly refer to the natural, native language.⁸⁴

The first episode in the first canto of ‘The Faerie Queene’ centres on the serpent-woman ‘Errour’ or ‘Error’. The Knight, described as the ‘Patron of true Holinesse’, discovers in ‘*Errour’s den* | A monster vile’, ‘[h]alfe like a serpent horribly displaide, | But th’other halfe did womans shape retaine’ (I.1.14).⁸⁵

Although Spenser describes her as a serpent-like being, she can also be seen as an image of a great tongue: ‘[h]er huge long taile her den all ouerspred...Pointed with mortall sting’, symbolising her poisonous language (I.1.15). Much of the imagery and reference to her in the first Canto relates to her mouth and throat, and in particular their spewing of ‘bookes and papers’ (I.1.26). She is not any generic monster or adversary, but is the incarnation of wrong-writing. As a ‘tongue’ was in the early modern period, she is a metonym of language. This tie to the origin of language classifies her as another permutation of the mother tongue.

This is consolidated by her breeding of little ‘tongues’: ‘Of her there bred | A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed...eachone [*sic*] | Of sundry shapes, yet all ill fauored’ (I.1.15). Like Falstaff, she has a ‘bellyful of tongues’, but Falstaff’s is entirely conceptual, whereas Errour carries a bellyful of her offspring, which are ‘serpents small...fowle, and blacke as inke’ (I.1.22). But their form as serpents suggests little tongues. She engenders a multitude of tongues, which are identified with ink, a primary vehicle for the transmission of language. She constantly gestates and births her ‘whole school of tongues’, for when the Knight enters her cave they

⁸⁴ For example, ‘mother tongue’ is used to denote English on the title pages of: Thomas Blundeville, *A plaine and full description of Petrus Plancius and his vniuersall Map*, (1592), p. 245, contained within Thomas Blundeville, *exercises containing sixe treatises*, (1594); Philipp Melanchthon, *The iustification of man by faith only*, (1548); John Harding, *The chronicle of Ihon Hardying in metre*, (1543); Thomas Blundeville, *The theoriques of the seuen planets shewing all their diuerse motions*, (1602) available at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 14 November 2014].

⁸⁵ Edmund Spenser, Epigraph to Book I, of *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche, Jr., (London: Penguin, 1978).

return to her mouth, the seat of her own tongue: ‘Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone’ (I.1.15). Errour wraps her tongue-like tail around the Knight until he ‘grypt her gorge’, and presumably slitting her throat she spews out a ‘horrible and blacke’ liquid like ink and a ‘vomit full of bookes and papers’ (I.1.19-20). Her emission of books and papers reinforces her personification of various forms of language, of written, spoken, plural and deformed. Out of the same ‘hellish’ hole came ‘[h]er fruitfull cursed spawne...fowle, and blacke as inke’ (I.1.22). Her offspring gather around the gaping wound of ‘her wide mouth’, ‘And sucked vp their dying mother blood’ in a cannibalistic moment, where the bloody ink, the vehicle of false, deceitful or wandering language, is consumed (I.1.25). They drink her up, their own mother tongue, they ‘[d]euoure their dam’ until ‘[t]heir bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst’ (I.1.26). Spenser presents an image of a false tongue, a false mother tongue or mothering tongue, being consumed by the very deceit and falsity that it engenders. Both Falstaff and Error are monstrous, unusually gendered figures – Falstaff in his mothering of tongues and Errour in her female, serpentine form – who offer a disturbing configuration of the origin of new life and language.

Despite Spenser’s allegorical didacticism which privileges truth and virtue over falsity and sin, as with Shakespeare, Spenser presents ‘error’ as inflected with the double meaning of wandering as well as mistake.⁸⁶ At the beginning, the Knight and his Lady enter a forest, ‘all within were pathes and alleies wide | With footing worne, and leading inward farre’ (I.1.7), until they ‘stray’ and ‘[t]hey cannot finde that path, which first was showne, | But wander too and fro in wayes vnknown’ (I.1.10). After defeating Errour, the path is suddenly clear and he ‘backward sought to wend; | That path he kept, which beaten was most plaine, | Ne ever would to any

⁸⁶ In its moral allegory, *The Faerie Queene* contains more obvious normative judgments, sharply distinguishing between not only being in error or being correct, but between right and wrong as good and bad.

by-way bend' (I.1.28). Both the labyrinthine forest, with its winding paths, and the serpent-woman, with her winding coils 'in knots and many boughtes vpwound', are symbols of meandering error (I.1.14). At one level, Spenser is making a point that error, by virtue of it being false, will eventually be vanquished by truth and goodness and will destroy itself, as her thousand offspring destroy themselves by drinking her 'black bloud' until they burst (I.1.24). But significantly the form of the allegory organises itself through gendered, multiple tongues, through female language in error.

It has been argued that 'Error', as a personification of language in error, is intimately bound up with polemical Protestant discourse. As Catherine Bates points out 'The Redcrosse Knight's initial failure to read the warning signs correctly is what leads him directly to Error's den'; it is specifically a mistaken reading which embodies error for Spenser, both in the Redcrosses misreading and the figure of Error which represents biblical misinterpretation and misplaced faith.⁸⁷ Andrew Hadfield argues that 'The Faerie Queene' has an anti-Catholic agenda and compares Error and the later female figure of Duessa, both poisonous and destructive, with a Roman Catholic threat.⁸⁸ Douglas Brookes-Davies also sums up: 'Error represents false learning...original sin, and fraud or deceit', arguing specifically that '[t]he vomit full of bookes and papers is, specifically, false Catholic doctrine and anti-Protestant propaganda; the "frogs and toades" allude to Revelation 16:13'.⁸⁹ Error is described in overt religious terms as being 'full of filthie sin', as not only wrong but

⁸⁷ Catherine Bates, "'The Faerie Queene': Britain's National Monument' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133-145, p. 138. Bates makes the point that the form of the poem, its allusive twists and turns, its winding narrative and the struggle for the reader to keep up, formalises the sense of error created, as the reader is drawn into this labyrinth.

⁸⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 131.

⁸⁹ Douglas Brookes-Davies, *Spenser's 'Faerie Queene': A Critical Commentary on Books I and II*, pp. 19, 22.

damnably wrong (I.1.24). The initial description of her is of a thing ‘Whom God and man does hate’: God, religion and judgement are the lens through which Error is perceived (I.1.13). Brookes-Davies argues that because of Spenser’s Protestant stance, Archimago the magician, disguised as a hermit in the next section, is ‘a Roman Catholic teacher pictured as a conjuring hypocritical whisperer.’⁹⁰ He claims that Error and Archimago are two types of symbolic temptation to false doctrine, that Error is specifically a form of religious error.⁹¹

This is supported by some early modern anti-Catholic writers. Thomas Cranmer exhorts ‘[l]isten not to the false incantations, sweet whisperings, and crafty juggling of the subtle papists, wherewith they have this many years deluded and bewitched the world’.⁹² The Roman Catholic tongue bewitches the world through language, enchanting and overpowering sensible thought with ‘crafty juggling’, ambiguous mumbling as well as equivocating, resisting precision and clarity both in the content and form of speech. Error, with her many tongues, represents foreign, multiple and therefore unnatural tongues. Spewing ink and books, she contains within her Catholic doctrine and polemics. It seems clear that Spenser produces an unnatural image of the mother tongue in order to represent the greatest wrong: mistaken belief in the Catholic faith. But in doing so he aligns female speech with error, playing upon anxieties about women’s language and what women may create. Unnaturalness is the key here: Falstaff’s belly is unnatural, Error is unnatural as she births many deformed children which at her gory end drink her blood. The place of nurturing becomes a place of horror. Both these forms of the mother tongue work

⁹⁰ Brookes-Davies, *Spenser’s Faerie Queene*, pp. 280-1.

⁹¹ Brookes-Davies, *Spenser’s Faerie Queene*, p. 283.

⁹² Thomas Cranmer, ‘A Preface to the Reader’ of *Defence of the True and Catholick Doctrine of the Sacrament* (1550) in *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), p. 7.

against its strong naturalising tendency, that it is the natural language of the nation, nurtured and delivered by the originating relationship with the mother.

1.1.2.5 Religious and Maternal Tongues

Errour speaks Catholic language, suggested by her inarticulacy: her voice is only a ‘bray’ which has politico-religious implications (I.1.17). As Carla Mazzio points out, ‘In Protestant polemic, the Catholic liturgy was deemed unintelligible both for individual utterance and for communal participation.’⁹³ James Pilkington provides a historical basis for a parallel between mumbling and Roman Catholicism with his reference to a ‘mumble-matins’ as a mocking name for a Roman Catholic priest.⁹⁴ The Latinity of the Roman Catholic Mass led the congregation to repeat prayers in a language that they did not understand in a mindless iteration or mumbling. The priest ‘mumbles up’ prayers, protecting the passage of truth between him and God. The inaudibility or incomprehensibility of the prayers even permitted the possibility that the words were completely devoid of content.⁹⁵ In Errour, Spenser draws upon these empty semantics to represent the vacuity of Catholic doctrine. She is pregnant with tongues, none of which can speak. Her multiple tongues represent linguistic plurality, a move away from the native mother tongue to embrace the foreign Roman Catholic Latin.

⁹³ Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 10.

⁹⁴ Referring to men, women and children, Pilkington asks ‘Howe can they be learned, havinge none to teache them but Sir John mumble-matins?’ See James Pilkington, *Aggeus and Abdius Prophetes* (1562), available at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 30 August 2014].

⁹⁵ As Mazzio points out, the phrase ‘mumble vp’ was first used by William Tyndale in 1528 to describe Roman Catholic liturgical speech. ‘Nether care they but even to mumble vp so moch every daye (as the pye and popygay speake the wote not what) to fyll their belyes with all. Yf they will not lat the laye man have the words of God in his mother tonge yet let the preistes have it which for a greate parte of them doo vnderstonde no latine at all: but synge and saye and patter all daye with the lypyes only that which the herte vnderstondeth not.’ See William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christen Man* (1528), Sig.xiiii r. at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 1 August 2011]. See also Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, p. 21.

These Protestant anxieties of speech, of fumbled communication of the sacred ‘Word’, are also expressed over women’s speech and the quality and rectitude of the language the mother grants. This is clearly discernible in Spenser’s *Error*, as a sinful, debased female tongue, breeding a multitude of heretical tongues inside her. Caroline McManus argues that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century it was thought ‘that godly women should nurture their children both physically, by breast-feeding, and metaphorically, by catechizing and teaching’.⁹⁶ John Craig’s *The Mother and the Child* (1611) is described as a ‘short catechisme’, consisting of very short questions and answers that provide rules for godly living and thought. It is intended to be read aloud between ‘Mother’ and ‘Child’, with ‘M. Why did God make you? C. To serve him. M. How will God be served? C. According to his word’, and so on, where each question interrogates the assumptions of the last answer, becoming seemingly irrefutable.⁹⁷ McManus suggests it is possible that early modern women were responsible for the nurturing of ‘the Word’ as well as the body of the child through this type of catechism, yet this text acts more as a doctrinal script than any tool of female ‘domestic authority’.⁹⁸ Indeed the ‘Mother’ holds no real authority in the text as it is not her voice that transfers knowledge: it is the ‘Child’ who instructs any reading child and mother through the answer to the question.⁹⁹ The form of the text prohibits female influence and ensures the safe transmission of doctrine from man, as the author.

McManus argues that *Error* offers ‘a specifically gendered illustration of the dangerous results of (corrupt) women reading and dispensing (corrupt) spiritual

⁹⁶ Caroline McManus, *Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queene’ and the Reading of Women* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 219.

⁹⁷ John Craig, *The Mother and the Child* (1611), available at *EEBO*: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 1 August 2011].

⁹⁸ McManus, *Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queene’*, pp. 219, 230.

⁹⁹ See also *Catechisms written for mothers, schoolmistresses, and children, 1575-1750*, ed. Paula McQuade (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

doctrine', bringing together models of the female, Roman Catholicism and falsity to reinforce the negativity of the other.¹⁰⁰ This creates a structure of early modern gendered heterodoxy through the symbol of the mother tongue. It sharpens the misogyny around characters like Mistress Quickly, the Nurse and Cressida (explored above) and the problems they have with language. Yet these Shakespearean characters speak in a context of irony, ambiguity and comedy, qualifying the presentation of women as imperfect speakers, whereas Spenser's association between women and error, even dangerous interpretation and speech is much more explicit.¹⁰¹

This chapter has explored the early modern meaning of the mother tongue, evidencing four case studies where gender and error is the main theme. The mother tongue was used to create an idea of national identity by connecting the language and the nation, naturalised through the mother, according to the several permutations of naturalness discussed earlier. But the mother, who is necessary to the symbol, is also restricted from owning and controlling that language as a woman; she cannot use the power she delivers. Thus the mother tongue centres on a contradiction: in their erratical use of language, women's language is frowned upon by purists, yet at the same time the most natural, national form of the vernacular belongs to women through the mother tongue. Mistress Quickly and the Nurse demonstrate the tendency for error to attach itself to women, as uneducated, excessive speakers, both in contrast with male authority figures. The apogee of this is Error in 'The Faerie

¹⁰⁰ McManus, *Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'*, p. 235.

¹⁰¹ McManus, *Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'*, p. 235. Traub argues that the female reproductive body is the repressed figure upon which is based 'the development of a "prototypical" male subject in the *Henriad*'. She also acknowledges the deficiencies of reading women as instruments of reproduction, where sexuality and subjectivity revolves around what they pass on: 'One of the unfortunate legacies of this conflation of sexuality and reproduction is the contemporary critical impulse to collapse the whole of female subjectivity into a maternal position defined by nurturance, fecundity, and non-differentiated access to the language of the body', begging the question where does that leave women who do not have children? Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, p. 63.

Queene': women do not just make errors, they embody it. Shakespeare, however, subverts the image of the mother tongue through Falstaff, which throws doubt upon purists' attempts to preserve the 'natural' integrity of the language by excluding foreign elements. Both Shakespeare and Spenser reveal unnatural tongues, the natural language without the stereotypical mother/woman, yet for very different reasons. With Falstaff, it could be read as mocking such mythical purity, especially given Shakespeare's positive inclination towards linguistic 'enfranchisement', explored in the next chapter.

1.2. Error and the Other Tongue

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Section 2: Getting Lost

2.3. Error in *The Comedy of Errors*

The previous section focused on both printed and spoken language, examining national language first in a domestic context and then in a foreign context. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first is restricted solely to the printed text, and picks up on a different facet of error in Shakespeare. The discussion shifts from a focus on gender to the early modern meaning of error as wandering. Gendering error is something that is done to it; gender-based associations and ideologies become attached to it. Wandering, however, is something that error does itself: it is part of its dual and ambiguous meaning, which goes beyond mistake. Wandering is one of Shakespeare's dominant themes in his most direct engagement with error: *The Comedy of Errors* (1594). The theme of error is expressed through an erratical first printed edition in the first Folio. The errors of the material text centre on the speech prefixes of the two sets of twins, enhancing the confusion of identity that drives the plot. I argue that, contrary to the ideology of New Bibliography, which conceives of the editors' role as that of an archaeologist, uncovering the original version of the play, the textual errors intersect with and extend the theme of error.

The second part of the chapter proceeds from textual errors to thematic error. Error as wandering bears close conceptual resemblance to Lecercle's theory of *délire*, as a form of delirium or madness, as a deviation from the norms of communication. Error manifests itself in several ways in the play: global wandering, mistaken identities, which threaten individual identity, and bodily errors, such as physical markings of past error and incoherent exclamations, the suppression of which maintain the errors' comedy.

2.3.1.1 *Where to Begin?*

This chapter begins by considering the problem of editing Shakespeare's texts and how error is cast within them. Stephen Orgel identifies the most basic assumption of editing as 'that the correct text is the author's final manuscript...We assume in short that the authority of a text derives from the author. Self evident as it may appear, I suggest that this proposition is not true: in the case or renaissance dramatic texts it is almost never true.'¹ When this is compared to Barbara Mowat's claim that 'the idea of "authorial intention" is, for many editors, at the heart of the editorial project', it reveals a tension between how the editor positions the author and how the author should be positioned in the text.² Orgel argues that the 'correct' text is not the text that derives from the author yet for Mowat this assumption is foundational. The implications of rejecting attempts to discern the author's original script altogether would be radical and severe but it is possible, at least, to show that the notion of a singular 'correct' text is an editorial construction. There is insufficient evidence to determine a text's fidelity to the original source, and therefore claims to authenticity are frequently based on conjecture. It is in the nature of this editorial process that error cannot be completely excised; the process itself is epistemologically limited when the original manuscript is the yardstick of correctness. This lack of evidence means that the determination of error is fuzzy, and errors cannot be identified with certainty.

The powerful ideology of authorial intention co-opts a moral discourse for its own legitimization: the 'correct' reading is still the one thought most likely to be 'Shakespeare'. On the other hand, 'bad' quartos are often explained as being so

¹ Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

² Barbara Mowat, 'The Problem of Shakespeare's Text(s)' in *Textual Formations and Reformations*, eds., Laurie Maguire and Thomas Berger, (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 131-48, p. 139.

because of interference from the theatre (being adapted from performance, deriving from a prompt book or being memorially reconstructed from the mind of an actor) or from the printing house (being scribal or compositorial error).³ Orgel outlines the myth that the aesthetically best text is that most loyal to Shakespeare's original manuscript: 'The notion that a bad poem cannot be by Shakespeare is a very old one, and it involves a strategy of definition: it defines Shakespeare as the best poet, and then banishes from the canon whatever is considered insufficiently excellent.'⁴ This is the romance of origins – Shakespeare's genius comes in part from subsequent editorial judgements of excellence, since these set the standards by which authenticity is judged. Orgel, discussing the difficulty of remaining true to 'the genuine obscurity, even incomprehensibility, of some of the text', admits that 'my basic feeling as an editor is that texts aren't ideas, they are artefacts, and I want to preserve as much as I can of their archaeology'.⁵ The textual 'obscurity' to which Orgel refers are the parts without origin. Conversely his interest in the 'archaeology' of the text reveals his own investment in the power-origin he is struggling to resist—to edit the Shakespearean text as an artefact rather than an object very closely associated with Shakespeare.

A focus on origins and Orgel's simultaneous resistance and attraction to them can be elucidated through Jacques Derrida's use of 'arche' or 'arche-writing'.

'Arche' comes from the prefix 'arch-' from the Greek *ἀρχή*, meaning beginning, origin, as demonstrated in 'archaeology': the search for the origins of history.

'Arch-' also means chief or principle, as in 'archbishop', and the suffix '-arch' denotes ultimate rule, as in 'patriarch'. The early uses of this word and morpheme

³ See Laurie Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The Bad Quartos and Their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴ Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare*, p. 232.

⁵ Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare*, p. 16

connect the origin with power. But the origin of something is often as opaque as it is important, demonstrated in the Aristotelian dictum that nothing can come of nothing—‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’. Derrida expands on this dictum that the origin has no beginning in his reference to ‘arche-writing’. ‘To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance.’⁶ The ‘loss of what has never taken place’ is the loss of the origin that never was – it only appears as it disappears. Thinking of arche or the origin as simultaneously appearing and disappearing negates or at least disturbs the origin of the Shakespearean text for which editorial method still frequently strives.

‘Archery’, a cognate of ‘arche’, is the practice of finding the centre. It works under the conceptual model that privileges the origin and the centre, where the aim of the sport is to pierce the concentric circles and middle point. The OED gives the word-origin from the Latin *arcus* bow, forgetting the earlier Greek origin which ties the origin to power, preferring the Apolline beauty of the curve and seeing that shape in the archer’s tool. The earliest use of ‘arch’ comes from ‘The Court of Arches’ which was the Court of Appeal of the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁷ It is ambiguous whether the ‘arch’ refers to the architectural arches of the church where the court was held, or to the arches or rulers who presided there. The contiguity of power and origin is revealed this time in the history of ‘arch’. The OED states that the former was the original meaning of the word but this focus on bow and curve from the Latin

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 112.

⁷ OED, see <www.OED.com> [date accessed 28 April 2012].

obscures the proximity to power inherent in the earlier Greek word.⁸ The Latin cognate, in its relation to bow, reveals the desire to discover, order and control the origin, whereas the Greek points not only to beginnings but to power. Between the Greek and the Latin there is the struggle between the Dionysian disorder and the Apolline order.⁹ It is the Greek power-origin on which Derrida draws in his reference to ‘arche-writing’, rather than the Latin ordered and discoverable origin, and in doing so he denies the truth of the unique subject at an originary centre.¹⁰ In the present context, this amounts to the denial that Shakespeare, as a unique subject, is the sole originator and aesthetic standard for the texts we now ascribe to him. ‘Where to begin?’ is as much a question of where an editor should start given these methodological and conceptual textual problems, as a question of beginnings in general—where is the origin: can we create one or how can we edit without a beginning?

2.3.1.2 *New Bibliography*

Present-day editing exists in the shadow of a mid-twentieth century movement that presupposed that a definitive version of the original manuscript could be recovered: New Bibliography. Fredson Bowers advocated that in ‘stripping the veil of print from the texts, one may recover a number of the characteristics of the manuscript that

⁸ In the entry for ‘arch’ the *OED* claims that the earliest use of ‘arch’ comes in 1297 to ‘The Court of Arches’ which was the ecclesiastical court of appeal for the province of Canterbury, formerly held at the church of St. Mary-le-Bow, so named from the arches that supported its steeple. See <www.oed.com> [date accessed 28 April 2012].

⁹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ This relates back to *The Comedy of Errors*: in the doubling of the twins, ‘one is genius to the other’ (V.1.333). At first it seems that Shakespeare is acknowledging the idea of origins, but in failing to state to which twin he is referring (a theme running throughout the play) he maintains the uncertainty of the origin and, in practice, refutes the possibility of an origin. Here an origin is the beginning of a linear progression, where something follows something else, where simultaneity does not exist, even if the difference between the two is only marginal. Origins are ambiguous in the play more broadly, for although we are told one twin was older, suggesting a precedence, it is again left ambiguous which twin was the first. The closing lines of the play reinforce simultaneity rather than origin: ‘let’s go hand in hand, not one before the other’ (V.1.426).

was given to the printer. From such evidence one may eventually determine, not impressionistically as at present but scientifically, which were Shakespeare's own papers'.¹¹ He assumes that there was an authoritative, finished manuscript of a play which originated from a single author, a manuscript which is no longer available because of the interferences of the printing process, of various scribes and compositors. Through a scientific approach that accumulates, compares, measures and gathers evidence, it is possible to ascertain, according to a set of fundamental principles, what Shakespeare originally wrote and therefore identify the 'errors' in the text.

This is not to present New Bibliography as having an overly simple approach to editing. W. W. Greg is open about the deficiencies of this scientific approach and that textual criticism is 'tentative'.¹² He sets down rules for dealing with a Shakespearean text: seven straightforward, logical steps for coming to a satisfactory result. He displays a level of confidence that is absent from present Shakespearean editing, claiming that 'the text of the plays contained in the early editions, though no doubt corrupted in one way and another, is nevertheless in most cases of very respectable and even high authority.'¹³ Despite Greg's title—*The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*—he sees editing Shakespeare to be less problematic than perhaps editors at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In a sense, the problems of a Shakespearean text have become magnified and more salient after decades of living with them rather than feeling enthusiastic and confident of their removal.

¹¹ Fredson Bowers, 'Today's Shakespeare Texts, and Tomorrow's', *Studies in Bibliography* Vol. 19, (1966), 39-65, p. 59.

¹² W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. ix.

¹³ Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. vii.

New textualism, working in the legacy of New Bibliography, has critiqued its predecessor's assumptions.¹⁴ New Textualism is the product of poststructuralist thought on textual criticism. Plurality and indeterminacy are now an accepted part of Shakespearean editing, ushered in by the division of *King Lear* into two texts, the Quarto and Folio, claimed to be two different versions of the play.¹⁵ Focus has shifted to the materiality of the text and, according to John Jowett, editing now sees texts as material objects that are subject to error. If two texts differ, those differences can be framed in terms of questions about textual production rather than deformation.¹⁶ Errors, once considered bad, are now as likely to be thought of as revealing. Jowett argues that since the division of *King Lear*, 'in the case of a textual variant editors now had to consider not simply which reading was correct, but whether the variant represents either two alternative valid readings or one valid reading alongside one error.'¹⁷ The plurality of textual variation, and by extension uncertainty, has been rescued from being cast off as error. An editor now makes room for censorship, scribal confusion, authorial revision, theatrical adaptation or compositorial space-saving as possible alternatives to error. This, in turn, opens out the scope of understanding to include valuable historical information these alternative explanations may bring.

It is important to emphasise that since New Bibliography, the editing of Shakespeare has moved on, its principles altered in the intervening decades. Yet

¹⁴ On New Textualism, see Randall McLeod, 'Un-editing Shakespeare', *Sub-Stance*, Vol. 10/11, Vol. 10, no. 4 - Vol. 11, no. 1, Issue 33-34, (1981/1982), pp. 26-55; Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, 'The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44, 1993; Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996); Laurie Maguire and Thomas L. Berger eds., *Textual Formations and Reformations* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998). For a critique of New Bibliography, see Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms. Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁶ John Jowett, 'Editing Shakespeare's Plays in the Twentieth Century', *Shakespeare Survey* Vol. 59, (2006), 1-19, p. 14.

¹⁷ Jowett, 'Editing Shakespeare's Plays in the Twentieth Century', p. 15.

there is still an ideal view of the text, on which basis some aspects are privileged above others according to an agreed set of principles that have their roots in New Bibliography and even earlier. As Leah Marcus points out, '[t]o an extent that few of us recognise, our standard editions are shaped by nineteenth-century or even earlier assumptions and ideologies.'¹⁸ Barbara Mowat notes that '[t]he belief of Bowers and other New Bibliographers remains current orthodoxy among Shakespeare editors, as one can see from the textual introductions to standard Shakespeare editions, where the editorial rationale is inextricably linked to the editor's view of "the manuscript" seen as lying behind the chosen early printed text.'¹⁹ For Mowat, the structures in which we think about the texts are in themselves limiting: 'editors continue to debate which version prints *the* authorial manuscript and which *the* theatrical "prompt-book," or which prints the early holograph and which the holograph revision, and where a garbled early printed version can be accounted for only as the result of an actor's memorial reconstruction'.²⁰ As Mowat points out, modern editions of Shakespeare still assume that the author's hand is the ideal document and the further a text moves away from this the more it is 'corrupted'.

A New Textualist approach might understand the semantics of error as unstable and consequently holds that removing errors may obscure important details in a text. Most obviously, textual cruces highlight this problem. Alteration of difficulties in the text, often errors or variants, has been claimed to alter the text significantly and in unexpected ways given the size of the word or even letter to be amended. For example, notable editorial cruces that have a long critical and editorial

¹⁸ Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Mowat, 'The Problem of Shakespeare's Text(s)', p. 132. Maguire makes the same observation: 'The long-term influence of the New Bibliography can be seen in the apodeictic rhetoric of textual introductions to most twentieth-century scholarly editions.' See Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The Bad Quartos and Their Contexts*, p. 22.

²⁰ Mowat, 'The Problem of Shakespeare's Text(s)', p. 136.

history are the wise/wife dilemma in *The Tempest* and Falstaff's 'babbled o' green fields'/'A Table of green fields' from *Henry V*.²¹ The history of their treatment is more indicative of the ideology of the historical moment than any objective improvements to the text itself. In the twentieth and twenty-first century, attention has turned away from some conception of the 'best' way to amend a text to what those choices say about the editor and the imagined reader. Textual cruces reflect editorial attitudes and ideologies rather than pursuing ever closer approximations of the 'correct' text.

When the demand for authorial certainty and precision are dominant, the errors become a sub-text, a relegated second narrative that exists alongside a modern edition, suppressed to maintain the authority and holistic structure of the authorised version.²² Like any kind of social perversion, it must be concealed. Plurality, then, by extension, becomes a kind of perversity because of the need to present a single version. Even the editorial gloss that attends to ambiguous or uncertain meaning provides only one explanation of the many that may be appropriate. So the ambiguity that some poetic language works hard to achieve is restrained and even blacklisted by the editorial process.²³ The official text, seeking a close relation to the author and its origin through a misapplication of the scientific process, obscures the erratical text that is wandering, uncontrollable and inexplicable, structurally and authorially uncertain and at the mercy of editors to expunge.

²¹ Discussed in detail by Jeanne Addison Roberts, "'Wife" or "Wise"—"The Tempest" 1.1786', *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 31 (1978), 203-208 and George Walton Williams, 'Still Babbling of Green Fields: Mr. Greenfields and the Twenty-third Psalm', *Shakespeare, Text and Theater: Essays in Honor of Jay L. Halio*, eds. Lois Potter and Arthur F. Kinney, (Associated University Presses: London, 1999), 45-61.

²² For example, *The Riverside Shakespeare* has a 'Textual Notes' section at the end of the play where textual details that do not appear in the main body of the play are noted, such as the variants between texts. At the beginning of the Cambridge edition of *Cymbeline*, there is a 'Textual Note' which explains the otherwise silent modernization of spelling, the treatment of stage directions and the division of the play into acts and scenes. See Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. Butler, pp. 73-4.

²³ If ambiguity within language, especially poetic language, is not axiomatic, see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1991, first published 1930).

2.3.1.3 *The Problem of Names and Binaries*

In the Folio text (the earliest printed edition) the most prominent and confusing textual error in *The Comedy of Errors* centres around the characters' names, especially those given to the two Dromios and Antipholuses. Laurie Maguire states that it 'is impossible to talk about *The Comedy of Errors* without invoking duality, polarity, antithesis, symbiosis, fusion, binary oppositions.'²⁴ Binaries, especially nominal binaries, simultaneously distinguish a double and admit error. I will focus specifically on these binaries, not in their opposite but in their identical state, and how this is created, controlled and confused by names. Most modern editions use Syracuse and Ephesus to distinguish the pairs, attributing citizenship to one place or the other to distinguish them, for example 'Antipholus of Ephesus' or 'Dromio of Syracuse'. Yet in the Folio Antipholus of Syracuse begins the play named as 'Antipholus Errotis' in I.2.1.²⁵ R. A. Foakes suggests that this is a corruption of Erraticus but does not give any further explanation of the variance of the word.²⁶ It identifies Antipholus as being in error, not in the sense of being incorrect but as a wanderer. Just as the play is structured through coincidence, a coincidence of naming occurs here in the Folio. Antipholus Errotis (of Syracuse) is abbreviated to 'E. Ant.'²⁷ in confusion with the abbreviation of Antipholus of Ephesus also to 'E. Anti' in Act III Scene 1. Effectively the only distinguishing feature is removed and both

²⁴ Laurie Maguire, 'The Girls from Ephesus' in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Miola (London: Routledge, 1997), 355-83, p. 356.

²⁵ See *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623, copy from Folger Shakespeare Library), p. 88 (II.1.1 in *Riverside Shakespeare* version) at *EEBO*: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 5 November 2011].

²⁶ R. A. Foakes, 'Introduction' to William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. R. A. Foakes, (London: Methuen, 1991), p. xii.

²⁷ See *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies*, p. 88 at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 15 November 2011].

twins become 'E. Anti'.²⁸ Foakes terms this a 'nice confusion': 'nice' perhaps in the sense of coincidence, that in a play about muddled and mixed identity the twins effectively become the same person by mistake.²⁹ Perhaps he terms this a 'nice' confusion because he can identify the 'correct' twin and amend the mistake to clarify the text. But if the other twin played the scene this would change the sense of the twins' equivalence. They are not twins in an ordinary sense. Twins do not have the same name or look exactly alike; there are still aspects that are individual. Yet the Dromios and Antipholi are dramatic tools to encourage their confusion, a confusion that is multiplied by the inclusion of not one but two pairs of identical characters. This kind of textual error, in removing the only means to identify the otherwise interchangeable characters, escalates the confusion of identity already embedded in the plot. Regularising the text removes the potential for this extreme kind of error. This error threatens the coherence of the play's structure. The confusion in the first Folio is no longer confined to the domain of the play, but potentially affects the actors, audience, readers and critics. It is not clear which twin is speaking, entering, or positioning himself on the stage, and removing this confusion fundamentally restrains the ways in which the play can be conceived.

Foakes's description suppresses the significance of this textual 'coincidence' and undermines its importance. Where the names of the characters are the only things that hold together the logic of the play, if names become isomorphic then the world of the play falls apart: a strange land is entered, governed by error, one that is absurd, bizarre, where the plot does not make sense because two characters are impossibly the same. This is, however, precisely the world of error that the play plunges us into. The theme of error is taken seriously, rather than being relegated to a

²⁸ See *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies*, p. 90, at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 15 November 2011].

²⁹ Foakes, 'Introduction', p. xii.

series of coincidences strung together to create a farce. The similarity of some characters' names is not the only problem. Six lines after the 'E. Anti' puzzle in Act Three Scene One, the Dromio-servant enters but instead of being identified alongside his master, Antipholus Errotis, as a wanderer, his epithet is given as 'Siracufia', breaking his association with Antipholus and emphasising his existence not as a wanderer but as a foreigner. We are presented with the confusing arrangement that the master and servant are differentiated by their names rather than being drawn together, with one being 'E. Anti' and the other as 'S. Dro'. This suggests the level of inconsistency, contradiction and error at work beneath the surface of the play, which modern editions remove.

The decision to include twins creates a series of binaries, further exaggerated by Shakespeare's decision to use two lots of identical names. The twins have several signifiers which can be divided into two sides:

Antipholus of Syracuse—Antipholus of Ephesus³⁰

Antipholus Errotis (lost)—Antipholus Sereptus (stolen)³¹

Menechmus—Menechmus Sosicles³²

Menaechmus Traveller—Menaechmus Citizen³³

Advena—Civis³⁴

³⁰ Given in most modern editions. For example, provided in the *The Arden Shakespeare* and *Riverside Shakespeare*.

³¹ First Folio. See *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies*, at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 15 November 2014].

³² In the 1595 William Warner edition of *Menaecmi*, Menechmus Sosicles, identified in Act II, is inconsistently identified in the speech prefixes as Menech. or Men. See Titius Maccius Plautus, *Menaecmi A pleasant and fine conceited comaedie*, trans. William Warner (London, 1595) at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 7 April 2012].

³³ When the brothers meet in the final scene of the 1595 Warner translation, the Menaechmi are distinguished by the speech prefixes as 'Men, Cit.' and 'Men. Tra.'. Sig.E4 v. They are initially named Menaechmus and Sosicles as they were originally known before one was lost and both were renamed, but at the beginning of Act Three Menaechmus is described as 'the trauailer', then Men. from there onwards, C2 r. and from Act Four the other Menaechmus is described as 'the Citizen', and Men. from there onwards: Sig.C4 v.

³⁴ Geoffrey Bullough points out that 'Surreptus and Erraticus correspond to the differentiation of the twin Menaechmi as "civis" and "advena" in the "Argumentum" prefixed to Plautus's play'. Geoffrey

Menaechmus I—Menaechmus II³⁵

Menaechmus—Sosicles³⁶

Plautus's *Menaechmi* is generally considered the main source for the play and as such creates a model on which Shakespeare bases his twins. Each name on the left signifies one twin, whilst each name on the right signifies another. We can thus trace a correspondence in the *Menaechmi* and the *Antipholi* as the names, concepts and binaries overlap between the *Menaechmi* and *The Comedy of Errors*. At first there seems to be little connection between Antipholus of Ephesus and his epithet 'Sereptus', meaning stolen away. This, however, was the name given by Plautus to the Menaechmus twin who was snatched from his home at Tarentum and taken to Epidamnum where he grew up. So Antipholus Sereptus (of Ephesus) corresponds to Menaechmus Sereptus because both are from the town in which the play is set.³⁷ In the *Menaechmi* the Grandfather 'changed the name of the surviving brother | (Because, in fact, he much preferred the other', explaining how both children ended up bearing the same name, an explanation Shakespeare does not give.³⁸ Because the source play is constantly recollected through the use of Sereptus and Errotis, Shakespeare's conflation of Plautus's setting of Epidamnum with Ephesus (I.1.21)

Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), Vol. 1, p. 22. Parker picks up on this form of naming for the twins in *The Comedy of Errors*, referring to the twins as 'alien' and 'citizen'. Parker, 'Elder and Younger: The Opening Scene of The Comedy of Errors', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 1983), 325-327, p. 326.

³⁵ As Gratwick terms them in his Latin version *Menaechmi*, also followed by Erich Segal who uses 'Menaechmus' and 'Menaechmus II' see *Plautus: Four Comedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 75-130.

³⁶ In the text, one Menaechmus is named Sosicles even though he was renamed as Menaechmus: 'The twin Menaechmus, who exactly resembles his brother and was originally called Sosicles (as we shall call him)' (p. 111), despite the Prologue's earlier explanation that they will both be called Menaechmus (p. 104). See E. F. Watling ed., *Plautus: The Plots of Gold and Other Plays* (London: Penguin, 1965).

³⁷ Yet Antipholus is only identified as 'Sereptus' through his Adriana who is defined as 'wife to Antipholus Sereptus' in the Folio. See *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623), p. 87 at *EEBO*: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 15 November 2011].

³⁸ Plautus, *The Brothers Menaechmus* (pp. 41-2) in *The Pot of Gold and Other Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling.

echoes Plautine binaries of ‘Citizen’ and ‘Foreigner’ in the structure of terms used to distinguish the twins. Owing to the Plautine influence, the world of the play expands as other texts such as the 1595 translation of the *Menaechmi* arbitrate our reading of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Various methods are used to separate the twins (each the pole of a binary) including distinctions between the citizen and the foreigner, between the stolen and the wanderer, and by extension, the traveller and citizen as found in Plautus’s *Menaechmi*. Binaries, then, are essential to the formation of identity and the twins’ names creates a conceptual framework, displaying two points of difference. For example, lost differs from stolen and citizen differs from foreigner. Rather than language being understood through single word definition by recording how it is used, these nominal adjectives give a different sense of their meaning by being contrasted with what they are not. The contrast, but also the similarity, of the terms further illuminates their meaning. Because multiple pairs of terms are used seemingly arbitrarily in the Folio edition to identify the pairs of twins, ‘lost’ is not only distinguished from ‘stolen’ but is associated with being a foreigner from Syracuse.³⁹ This is reminiscent of the description of the first Folio taken from ‘diverse stolen, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealth of injurious imposters, that exposed them’.⁴⁰ The Folio text is claiming rescue from such illicit wrongness, yet it cannot fully control the play’s content, specifically the errors that generate the confusion surrounding the twins. This set of errors gets

³⁹ This is reminiscent of the description of the First Folio as ‘diverse stolen, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealth of injurious imposters, that exposed them’. ‘To the Great Variety of Readers’ in *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623), at *EEBO*: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 15 November 2011]. The folio text is claiming the large-scale correction and rescue from such illicit wrongness yet it cannot fully control the twins that are defined together as lost, stolen and foreign. This category of error becomes uncontrollable despite the Folio editors claim to purge the text of these specific kinds of moral textual errors.

⁴⁰ ‘To the Great Variety of Readers’, in *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623), at *EEBO*: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 15 November 2011].

out of hand, despite the Folio editors' claim to purge the text of these 'frauds' and 'deformities'.

The proliferating error of the confusing speech prefixes applies, I would argue, to the page and stage equally. There are, however, some implications of this confusion that apply only to the printed text and in this way the experience of reading the play diverges from that of an audience member. Each pair of names repositions the understanding of the twins; renaming is an act of reidentifying. Their names and accompanying associations affect the interpretation of the entire play for the reader. They place more emphasis on one twin rather than another, an instance of which is one being termed 'citizen' against the other as 'traveller'. According to this distinction, one twin is central, safe, native, and belongs to the setting of the play, whereas the other twin fills the role of the outsider: unknown, from a different and perhaps strange culture, unsettled and unstable. But because the speech prefixes are changeable, other names soon usurp this understanding by introducing another form of emphasis. As Foakes points out, Menaechmus of Epidamnum (who corresponds to Antipholus of Ephesus) is more central dramatically than his twin brother, whereas Shakespeare gives his Antipholus of Syracuse more prominence, including nearly a hundred lines more dialogue than his brother.⁴¹ Plautus focusses the action of the *Menaechmi* on the twin in his home town whilst the other twin orbits around him, whereas Shakespeare reverses this feature, focusing on the wandering, lost twin, emphasising his being in error.

Overall, however, Shakespeare's twins hold more equal roles than the *Menaechmi* and this similarity is reflected in their greater degree of physical resemblance. He constructs the matching physicality of the Dromios, almost as if

⁴¹ R. A. Foakes, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

they share one body. When Nell the kitchen maid mistakes Dromio of Syracuse for her lover, she is able to describe him down to the smallest detail. Dromio says, she ‘told me what privy marks I had about me, as, the mark of my shoulder, the mole in my neck, the great wart on my left arm, that I amaz’d ran from her as a witch’ (III.2.141-4). Nell holds an intricate knowledge of his body because his twin carries exactly the same features. Shakespeare demonstrates that his twins are exactly the same physically, that they are the same person in all but name (a distinction that the printed text fails to preserve). Indeed Egeon says of his own twins ‘the one so like the other | As could not be distinguish’d but by names’ (I.1.51-2). In the process of naming the twins a homogeneous whole becomes something heterogeneous: two separate individuals. The naming function alone is what maintains the twins as separate entities, and without this separation the interpretation of the play descends into chaos. The naming function is required to make the play upon mistaken identities coherent, as without it the assumption underlying each comic misinterpretation is unstable.

2.3.1.4 Editing Error

McKerrow narrativises the textual problem of naming: ‘[t]he names by which the characters are indicated, instead of being the same throughout, frequently depend, much as they do in a novel, on the progress of the story’.⁴² For McKerrow, they are made to fit into the story, to contribute to whatever meaning is constructed or read into the text. He argues that, for example, Egeon first enters as the ‘Merchant of Siracusa’, which is then shortened to ‘Merchant’. In the next scene (II.2) a different merchant appears and another in IV.1, identified as ‘Mar.’, ‘E. Mar.’ or ‘Mer.’ In V.1

⁴² R. B. McKerrow, ‘A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare’s Manuscripts’, *Review of English Studies* (1935), Vol.44, 459-465, p. 460.

Egeon enters and recognises his sons while this last Merchant is onstage. McKerrow claims that as his name is in use by another character, Egeon becomes first ‘Mar. Fat.’ (Merchant Father) ‘and later simply “Father”’.⁴³ But this is not quite accurate: Egeon becomes variously ‘Fa.’; ‘Fat.’; ‘Fath.’; or ‘Father’ towards the end of the scene. There seems to be no reason for these changes. Such inconsistency is easily forgotten and removed from the memory of the text. McKerrow’s point is that Egeon’s identity changes from the beginning of the play as a merchant to discovering his lost sons and becoming a father, yet a brief study of more complex types of inconsistency between the Antipholi and Dromios’ names disables such straightforward conclusions.⁴⁴

Not only is error inconsistent, so is its appearance. Charles Whitworth states that ‘He [an editor] will be grateful, in the present case, for the relative brevity and relative cleanness of the Folio text of *The Comedy of Errors*, and that there is only the Folio text to contend with, no two-or-three-headed monsters.’⁴⁵ The many-headed monster of Whitworth’s description refers to the intractable problem of multiple editions of Shakespeare’s texts, which trouble editorial decision-making and prevent the certainty it requires. Yet other erratical monsters exist within *The Comedy of Errors*, confounding the ‘relative cleanness’ that Whitworth describes, and as the text has been emended they are slowly being forgotten.⁴⁶ ‘May an editor rectify Shakespeare’s errors?’ asks Whitworth.⁴⁷ Perhaps they are not all Shakespeare’s: with regard to the confusion of ‘Epidamium’ this is arguably the case.

⁴³ McKerrow, ‘A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare’s Manuscripts’, p. 460.

⁴⁴ McKerrow, ‘A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare’s Manuscripts’, p. 461.

⁴⁵ Charles Whitworth refers to an editor as ‘he’ yet Shakespeare has been edited by women and there is no reason to follow Whitworth’s assumption that only men can. Whitworth, ‘Rectifying Shakespeare’s Errors’ in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays* ed. Robert Miola (London: Routledge, 1997), 227-60, p. 244.

⁴⁶ Such as the speech prefixes of Dromio and Antipholus, discussed above, as well as the surprising re-naming of Luce as Nell and the confusion of the setting of Ephesus with Epidamnum.

⁴⁷ Whitworth, ‘Rectifying Shakespeare’s Errors’, p. 244.

In changing the setting from the *Menaechmi*'s Epidamnus to Ephesus, Shakespeare takes a clear step away from Plautus. But Epidamnus reappears in the text in another form, not quite precisely; it is slightly misplaced. Foakes claims that 'the Folio consistently prints "Epidamium", but "Epidamnum" is the form used by Warner [1595 edition] and derived from Plautus'.⁴⁸ Whitworth, however, points out that the original spelling from Plautus is 'Epidamnus', arguing that Alexander Pope incorrectly altered it to 'Epidamnum', which is neither germane to Plautus nor Shakespeare.⁴⁹ It is a fictional place that signifies neither the setting of *The Comedy of Errors* nor the *Menaechmi*. Errors are exacerbated by editors not diminished: difficulties are exaggerated and editorial errors become silently enshrined into the body of the Shakespearean text.

Correcting a text is a basic editorial principle. If a text is to be altered in any way the strongest justification for doing so is that it is 'wrong'. Yet at times editorial decisions seem to generate error rather than remove it. For example, in the final scene of the *Menaechmi*, when the brothers meet in the 1595 edition, the *Menaechmi* are distinguished by the speech prefixes as 'Men, Cit.' and 'Men. Tra.': 'Citizen' referring to the brother who was is now a citizen of Epidamnum where the play is set and 'Traveller' who is the twin who left Syracuse, the place of their birth. E. F. Watling does not preserve this method of distinction in his modern translation, sticking to the twins' original names 'Menaechmus' and 'Sosicles', disregarding the Prologue's claim that after one brother is lost Sosicles is renamed 'Menaechmus'. If, however, the errors belong to Shakespeare then correcting them is inconsistent with the desire to uncover the original Shakespearean manuscript.

⁴⁸ Foakes ed., *The Comedy of Errors*, see gloss, p. 5

⁴⁹ Whitworth, 'Rectifying Shakespeare's Errors', p. 245.

2.3.1.5 Error and Value

The approach to the errors or inconsistencies in the speech prefixes by editors is first to explain their origin and then to remove them. McKerrow suggests that *The Comedy of Errors* was printed from Shakespeare's foul papers, suggesting that the textual errors derive from the author's initial drafts: 'a play in which the names are irregular was printed from the author's original MS', as he only distinguished between the identical characters when he really needed to.⁵⁰ A prompter in the theatre would need to regularise the names to make the action, entrances and exits clear, suggesting perhaps that the Folio copy does not carry the mark of the theatre. Yet it seems that for anyone involved in the writing or construction of the text, such as an author or prompter, omitting an 'Ephesus' or 'Errotis' to identify the character would breed precisely the kind of confusion to which the play is vulnerable but at the same time cultivates. The confusion of twins is not only a textual error but is a part of the narrative that the play works hard to construct.

The terms of the editorial debate often permit a narrow understanding of error: Whitworth conceives of it in two ways, as arising from the 'standard "foul papers versus prompt copy" dichotomy', that errors in the text come from either a manuscript that is Shakespeare's rough draft, or from the manuscript transcribed for the theatre which has been altered according to theatrical requirements.⁵¹ Yet this dualistic view prohibits the perception of textual errors as part of the history of editing, printing, reading or performance; part of the etymological evolution of a word; or as revealing complexity of character. These alternative hermeneutics propose error as a valid part of a text. Although New Textualism attempts to open up

⁵⁰ McKerrow, 'A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare's Manuscripts', p. 464. For more on this designation of foul papers and prompt copy, see Paul Werstine, 'Post-Theory Problems in Shakespeare Editing', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 29, (1999), pp. 103-117.

⁵¹ Whitworth, 'Rectifying Shakespeare's Errors', p. 242.

a reading of the text in these terms, Whitworth's position is still influential. He summarises an accepted editorial approach to error: 'Some of the confusions in the text are of the sort usually attributed to unperfected authorial copy: descriptive or narrative stage directions, imprecise distinctions between characters, uncertain or alternate names for characters, missing or imprecise entrances and exits, and so on. All of these require editorial emendation'.⁵² He labels these features as 'mistakes', presupposing that they have little meaning, and that they need removing. A substantial section of the text, a kind of sub-text, is then excised or altered. In terms of *Errors*, removing these 'mistakes' may well affect the interpretation of the text, given that the play is deeply invested in the theme of error itself and constantly plays with the concept.

That Shakespeare's confusions have been easily and unfairly written away has been noted by Patricia Parker.⁵³ She argues against the dismissal of error or inconsistency by editors, using an example from the opening scene where Egeon tells the story of the shipwreck that separates the twins and the parents. The mother and father bind themselves to the mast of the ship, Egeon being responsible for the elder while the mother was 'more careful for the latter-born' (I.1.78). He then appears to contradict himself when he says later that he was left with the 'youngest' child (I.1.124). Where previous editors have assumed that Shakespeare confuses the 'elder' for the 'younger', Parker shows how this in fact emphasises the interchangeability and exchange of twins, explaining the significance of one twin's search for his divided half and demonstrating a rhetorical crossing or chiasmus.⁵⁴ She suggests that through the use of twins, Shakespeare creates a binary without precedence, where at the end of the play the two Dromios leave 'hand in hand',

⁵² Whitworth, 'Rectifying Shakespeare's Errors', p. 242.

⁵³ Patricia Parker, 'Elder and Younger: The Opening Scene of *The Comedy of Errors*', pp. 325-327.

⁵⁴ Parker, 'Elder and Younger: The Opening Scene of *The Comedy of Errors*', p. 325.

appropriate to 'the thematic concern with the abandoning of the quest for possession or control.'⁵⁵ As suggested above, Shakespeare gives a much more equal number of lines to the twins in comparison with Plautus and the 'error' here works to support this.

Ironically, error within *The Comedy of Errors* is neglected, yet in other plays it is given a higher status even when the same errors occur. First, in *Errors*, Luciana tells Antipholus of Syracuse that he should flatter Adriana:

Then, gentle brother, get you in again;
Comfort my sister, cheer her, call her wife;
'Tis holy sport to be a little vain
When the sweet breath of flattery conquers strife (III.2.25-8).

At least, this is one version. The Folio gives 'wise', but the Riverside Shakespeare and the Arden editions both give 'wife', following the second Folio.⁵⁶ 'Wise' is altered without explanation to follow what is deemed to be a less authoritative text. The debate is familiar: exactly the same 'wise/wife' problem occurs in *The Tempest*. Ferdinand says

Let me live here ever;
So rare a wond'ring father and a wise
Makes this place Paradise. (IV.1.123-5)

In *Errors*, 'wise' is changed to 'wife' to rhyme with 'strife'; in *The Tempest* some copies of the first Folio have 'wife' which is changed to 'wise' in most modern editions. Editors of both plays follow the prosody of the line to justify the change. Jeanne Addison Roberts argues that we see 'wise' in the Folio because the crossbar of the 'f' broke early in the print run, turning it to a long 's', removing Miranda from Ferdinand's thoughts. Stephen Orgel claims that we are now willing to see Miranda as well as Prospero and that a wife deserves praise as much as the father-in-law,

⁵⁵ Parker, 'Elder and Younger: The Opening Scene of *The Comedy of Errors*', p. 326.

⁵⁶ *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623), at EEBO: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 7 April 2012].

whereas previous editors have unconsciously only admitted Prospero. Orgel suggests that current societal values determine our reading and editing: '[w]e find only what we are looking for or are willing to see. Obviously it is a reading whose time has come.'⁵⁷

The same textual crux, made 'famous' in *The Tempest*, occurs first in *Errors* but has passed critically unnoticed.⁵⁸ As Ronald Tumelson states, '[i]n the last quarter of a century, no textual variant in the works of Shakespeare has captured the attention of his serious readers quite like *The Tempest*'s wise / wife crux.'⁵⁹ Yet Luciana's speech is serious and marks an important moment, one that shares the same feminist considerations with Ferdinand's words. *The Tempest* admits a woman where previously one was excluded, and the *Errors* of the First Folio repositions a woman not as a wife, giving her identity not through her relationship to a man, but through the sagacity of her own mind. In both *The Tempest* and *Errors* both 'wife' and 'wise' make sense in the context of the dialogue, complicating the textual decision. In *The Tempest* the textual complexity is deemed to reveal ideological reasons why one term is privileged over another. The same could be argued in *Errors*, that in flattering Adriana, Antipholus would be more successful if he called her 'wise' rather than 'wife'. 'Wise' would fit with her identity as the strongest, most eloquent female character in the play, whereas 'wife' seems to be more a statement of fact. Perhaps it is also a reading whose time has come.

Shakespeare's errors present the most significant ideological problem for editors: do they edit conservatively, reproducing the error because it more closely reflects the copy text, or do they alter the text, conforming to the consistency of

⁵⁷ Stephen Orgel, 'Prospero's Wife', *Representations*, No. 8 (Autumn, 1984), 1-13, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Made 'famous' according to Stephen Orgel, 'Prospero's Wife', p. 12.

⁵⁹ Ronald A. Tumelson II, 'Ferdinand's Wife and Prospero's Wise' *Shakespeare Survey* Vol. 59, (2006), 79-90, p. 79.

narrative required, producing a text that is more explicable, cogent and logical, even if it moves away from the form, style or reality of the copy text? Whitworth suggests that because *Errors* has no rival quarto editions, the editorial problem is reduced. Yet in another way this throws into relief the method used to deal with errors, for editors interpose themselves between the historical text and a modern edition without the ability to compare two authoritative editions. This is not to argue that Shakespeare's texts should never be altered, but before this stage is reached the criteria on which this decision is made—that an error is worthless—needs individual attention to avoid overriding any meaning an error may carry.

Textual errors in *The Comedy of Errors* are not always insignificant. They lead to a tangle of understanding that extends the theme of error the play is interested in enlarging.⁶⁰ Editing seeks to discipline, tidy and regulate: these editorial principles suppress the error found in Shakespeare, and are uniquely problematic to *The Comedy of Errors* as error is fundamental to the being of the play. The play itself challenges the definition that an error is worthless by raising error as a central issue to be surveyed and discussed. Furthermore, the material text is invaded by mistakes and uncertainties which work to express thematic error. The textual expresses the conceptual: there is a synchronicity of error in the inconsistent and misleading speech prefixes of the Dromios and Antipholi in the first Folio, as the play relies upon and actively constructs this kind of coincidental error. The material text, then, mirrors the conceptual error of the play but this is interrupted by the editorial process. When these two forms of error are seen together it seems that non-narrative error—the ignored sub-plot of the play, where characters are confused more often and to a greater extent than an edited version suggests—has a greater significance

⁶⁰ Even the silent authority of a text, the editor becomes confused and gets it wrong: Foakes claims that Antipholus 'enters in II.i as Antipholus Sereptus', but neither Antipholi feature in this scene. Foakes, 'Introduction' p. xii.

than has been thought. ‘Correcting’ Shakespeare’s errors suggests they have no semantic implications, yet the textual errors are linked in a generative sense with the narrative of error that drives the play.

2.3.2. Reading Errantly

I argued in part one that textual errors are not distortions to be excised, but actually extend the theme of error itself. In part two I explore the theme of error directly. An important manifestation of error, and one that corresponds to its early modern meaning as a wandering, can be explored through Lecercle’s theory of *délire*. In order to connect error as wandering to *délire*, I must first lay some conceptual groundwork for the categories of error that will be relevant to understanding the play. In particular, we must distinguish between error as formal, patterned and structured, and error as chaotic and uncontrolled, as a kind of madness.

There is a rigorous logic to the play that conforms to the unity of time and place: the action takes place within a short period of time, follows a chronological narrative and is confined to four locations. This logic imposes a structure on the play’s events: coincidences in which twins constantly miss each other, or one enters immediately after the other exits, create an increasingly complex but well-ordered structure. The play never allows them to appear on stage at the same time until the very end. There is a strong formal design to the play that relates back to its classical roots in Plautus. Freedman argues that ‘[t]he play is ostensibly about mistaken recognitions and mistaken timing: despite the presence of identical twins within the same town, the two brothers never meet up with each other and so never discover the cause of their confusion.’⁶¹ Perhaps Freedman’s designation of the timing as

⁶¹ Barbara Freedman, ‘Reading Errantly’ *Critical Essays on ‘The Comedy of Errors’*, ed. Robert Miola, 261-298, p. 261.

‘mistaken’ is liable to misrepresent it as a form of error that does not contribute to the unfolding of the play’s structure and theme. It is a seamless dance of entrances and exits, of doors and walls and of being in place at precisely the *right* time for the error to continue.

There are two types of error in the play. The first type of error is controlled; it adheres to the formal, classical requirement of spatial separation between the twins, and thus cannot be characterised as bad or wrong, since the timing is not mistaken but is perfectly intended. As Michel Serres says, despite appearances, ‘Nothing is absurd here, everything is exact, precise, and even necessary’.⁶² The second type of error is uncontrolled; here things go wrong that are beyond the control of the omnipresent forces at work in the play: fate, the author, the prompter or the printer. The textual errors discussed in the previous section, which differ from the carefully structured errors that drive the plot, fall into this category. The first formal type of error dominates and obscures the second form of error. The first type is merely quasi-error: it bears the superficial marks of error but betrays an underlying coherence. It is the second form of error that is wrong, lost, irregular, wandering and with all the inconsistency that the formal error rejects. The first type is part of a greater structure, legitimated by classical authority, whilst the second type is chaotic and disordered, made illicit by its accidental and unintentional presence.

2.3.2.2 *Delire*

In the early modern period ‘error’ meant not only a fault, offense or mistake, but wandering, as discussed in the introduction. In this way, error is a divergence from the straightforward path, evoking Lecercle’s theory of ‘*délire*’, also previously

⁶² Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*, trans. Jack Hawkes, ed. David Webb (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), p. 7.

discussed. This is particularly useful in discussing *The Comedy of Errors* because the strong sense of wandering combines with the confusion of mistaken identity, leading to a kind of delirium on behalf of the characters and, to a lesser extent, the audience. To be in *délire* is to ‘go beyond the bounds of common sense’, to stray from the commonsensical line.⁶³ The line, the border or boundary is that between common sense and individual or perhaps even irrational knowledge. These lines are metaphorical boundaries: the line marks the passing of a plough or its way ahead but can be applied more generally to the conception and ordering of phenomena. Lecercle discusses the boundaries of language, seeing them as fundamental to the disorganisation of language: ‘[t]he problem of frontiers is placed at the centre of the study of language’.⁶⁴ This is because language will sometimes break a boundary. He claims ‘[l]anguage will always try to utter what cannot be said, the subject will always be tempted to go beyond the frontier: in order to define a boundary one must at least attempt to cross it. This is exactly what happens in *délire*’.⁶⁵ The dividing line is contravened: for Lecercle it is crossed when language proceeds beyond its own bounds and continues to speak. This type of digression illuminates the fundamental condition of wandering in *The Comedy of Errors*, of peripatetic characters that constantly enter and exit, and the linguistic confusions that result.

The play opens with wandering, with Egeon’s narrative of shipwreck and loss. ‘Five summers have I spend in farthest Greece, | Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia, | And coasting homeward, came to Ephesus’ (I.1.132-4). This is a wandering journey of oblivion, travelling without identity, which ends in death: ‘Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend, | But to procrastinate his liveless end’ (I.2.157-8). As Egeon arrives another Merchant sets sail. ‘I am bound | To Persia,

⁶³ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 51.

and want guilders for my voyage' (IV.1.3-4). The setting of the play in the Mediterranean does not exist in geographical isolation, it is constantly being travelled to and from, allowing the theme of wandering to sail perilously close to disorientation. All the characters are travellers at one time or another. As well as occurring off-stage, travel and movement fills the scenes of the play. Antipholus Erotes says to his Dromio 'Why, how now, Dromio, where run'st thou so fast?' (III.2.71-2). Throughout the play the four men are constantly moving from one location to another, wandering in between sturdy thresholds that physically divide up the theatrical space and structure the play.

Although the characters fall into the error of mistaken identity, erratical wandering is a larger theme within the play. It presupposes the straight, correct line, patterned with idiosyncratic, unpredictable divergences. The geography of the twins' wanderings spatialises their error: they travel from Ephesus to Syracuse, and then from one house to another around Ephesus. Conceptually, error relies upon boundaries and the transgression of boundaries. Doors shut the twins out, providing physical boundaries, impenetrable frontiers of entry into the home. The settings are particularly important for this purpose: the Phoenix where the native Antipholus and his family live, the Porpentine for the courtesan, and the priory or abbey which becomes central in the fifth act. The action takes place either in 'the mart', or marketplace, outside three houses or the priory. The mart in its world of business stands in the opposite direction to the more open and ambiguous sea-port.

Doors form the threshold of these boundaries, distinguishing inner from outer, private from public, home from wandering. Antipholus of Ephesus says 'Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me, | I'll knock elsewhere, to see they'll disdain me' (III.1.120-1). The personified door realises the welcome or rejection it offers.

Other doors can be tested to see if they are spaces of welcoming. Luce asks from within Antipholus of Ephesus's house, 'Who are those at the gate?' (III.1.46). It is Antipholus of Ephesus who is locked out of his own house accompanied by Dromio of Ephesus. The gate or door is no small obstacle—throughout the play these thresholds are more like fortresses. The boundary is strong and clearly defined—it cannot be crossed by those who are not admitted and in a world of confused doubles these edifices provide a clear division between the two spaces. Antipholus threatens to break the boundary: 'Go fetch me something: I'll break ope the gate' (III.1.73). For the first time the twins come together by speaking across the boundary. Dromio of Ephesus responds to Antipholus: 'Break any breaking here, and I'll break your knave's pate', unknowingly threatening his own brother on the other side (III.1.74). Through the membrane of the door Dromio responds 'A man may break a word with you, sir, and words are but wind' (III.1.75). Breaking becomes an exchange of words and all of it is unsubstantial given the identity of the person to whom he is speaking. Similarly the abbey is impenetrable to those who gather outside, with dialogue the only thing able to cross the threshold. When Antipholus is inside the abbey, Adriana commands

	Good people, enter and lay hold on him.	
Abb.	No, not a creature enters in my house.	
Adr.	Then let your servants bring my husband forth.	
Abb.	Neither.	(V.1.91-4)

The abbey itself is an immovable fixture and it becomes a physical impossibility for Adriana to enter. People must work (or wander) around this monument—either they go in or he comes out. The fixity of such monuments throws the constant movement of the characters into relief, and will come to represent the termination of wandering, error or chaos.

For example, at the beginning of the play *Antipholus Erotes* [of Syracuse] is constantly banishing both Dromios and calling them back to him. ‘Get thee away’ says Antipholus, to which Dromio replies ‘Many a man would take you at your word, | And go indeed, having so good a mean’ (I.2.16-8). Antipholus’s ‘word’ has ‘so good a mean’ because it works on several levels. It refers to his truth or honour given in language, but also to the single word he has just spoken instructing Dromio ‘away’. Dromio threatens to take his ‘word’ literally and go away, not just apart from Antipholus but with the implication of disappearing. The threat of getting lost, even wilfully lost, haunts both sets of twins.

Similarly, ‘mean’ operates on several levels. It can refer to the semantics of Antipholus’s ‘word’, being the reason to leave as Dromio has been instructed, or to the gold he has just been given, being his means: he is more than happy to vanish with a large bag of gold. Alternatively it could refer to Antipholus’s face or mien. Given that Antipholus is grumpy, having just admitted ‘For with long travel I am stiff and weary’, his ‘good’ mien could sarcastically refer to his irascible expression and Dromio is therefore glad to avoid suffering the consequences of Antipholus’s mood (I.2.15). The indeterminacy of ‘away’—where, how far and until when—depends upon the ambiguity of ‘word’ and ‘mean’. At an early stage of the play, Shakespeare is using the concept of wandering to create semantic multiplicity. Antipholus’s destabilising order to wander ‘away’ is rendered further uncertain by the multiplicity of meanings which is itself a wandering from one interpretation to another. By virtue of this multiplicity, the sense of the concept verges on being lost and when present, this kind of playful, dangerous language only generates confusion.

2.3.2.3 Global Wandering

Wandering is so pervasive in *The Comedy of Errors* that it is not just a state of being but a tool for interpretation, specifically a way to explore and discover the body.

Dromio of Syracuse describes Nell, the kitchen maid, as ‘spherical, like a globe; I could find out countries in her’ (III.2.114-5). Dromio spatialises Nell’s body and his sexual experience of it. His wandering about it is supposed to suggest its size: she is so large her body contains whole countries which he traverses. But it also extends Dromio’s identity as a wanderer. For Antipholus Eroles [of Syracuse], Dromio’s wandering is linked to his ostensive disobedience. He describes Dromio: ‘the heedful slave | Is wand’red forth’ (II.2.2-3). Moving and travelling without fixed course or certain aim is the metaphor for understanding in the play. All of Dromio’s experience, even his sexual exploits, relate to journeying from one definite or indefinite place to another.

Ant. Eroles	Where Spain?	
Dro. of Syracuse	Faith, I saw it not; but I felt it hot in her breath	
Ant. Eroles	Where America, the Indies?	
Dro. of Syracuse	O Sir, upon her nose	(III.2.130-4)

Dromio admits ‘She is too big, I hope, for me to compass’ (IV.1.111). His compassing is to survey, map and traverse. It is the method of understanding, and in this case, deriding. Wandering precipitates the loss of identity, since the twins’ constant wandering prevents their paths overlapping. Exploring and understanding is a way of regaining identity, and thus wandering both precipitates a loss of identity and creates the possibility of its recovery.

The journey over Nell is an easy one to make, and Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse figuratively summarise its characteristics with ease. Yet the metaphorical wandering of error is and must be unmappable. Harold Bloom explores the metaphor

of the map of a text in *A Map of Misreading*. Reading a text 'is always an act of deciding, and what it tries to decide is meaning'.⁶⁶ Reading takes certain paths at the expense of others. A text is a space in which a series of decisions about meaning must be made, and therefore the experience of reading is also a wandering; a wandering through constantly branching paths of meaning. Texts are to some degree wildernesses, resistant to having their areas discovered and quantified. An attempt to understand the wilderness will lead to a misunderstanding unless the wilderness is transformed into a neutral space of understanding, the error corrected, the line drawn straight.

2.3.2.4 *Uncertain Understandings*

Délire is a conceptualisation of error that similarly resists correction. In its association of madness it expresses the frustrations of the Antipholi and those around them, which are never resolved and remain in délire. In Act One Scene Two, Antipholus Erotes has just arrived in Ephesus. After sending Dromio to their lodging he is surprised to see him arrive back again after only a short while: 'What now? How chance thou art return'd so soon?' (I.2.42). Dromio (of Ephesus) replies by reversing Antipholus's words: 'Return'd so soon! rather approach'd too late' (I.2.43). Of course the misunderstanding derives from the wrong Dromio appearing, but the effect on Antipholus is one of délire, where he is suddenly plunged into a world of confusion where people do not say what he expects—in fact they speak the opposite. For Lecercle, to be in délire is to 'go beyond the bounds of common sense'.⁶⁷ Antipholus and Dromio are in délire because of the loss of common sense: the shared sense of time between them has evaporated and although there is residual

⁶⁶ Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 5.

understanding between them in their appearance and the way they speak, they have lost basic agreement of the measure of time.

Antipholus's délire is echoed in Dromio's language, where he falls into an almost delirious description:

The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit;
The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell:
My mistress made it one upon the cheek:
She is so hot, because the meat is cold:
The meat is cold, because you come not home; (I.2.44-8)

Like so much of *Errors*, it makes sense according to its own logic. Délire is close to madness or delirium but is the sense-making part of it, where it is 'rich and imaginative'.⁶⁸ It is to go beyond the limits of madness 'to introduce method into it'.⁶⁹ Dromio races through his description in a panic, moving from the capon to the pig, clock and bell, pulling together disparate objects in a whirlwind. His language is recursive, jumping from one to the next at such speed that it becomes almost nonsensical because the relations between each item are lightly made.⁷⁰ Instead, these objects are connected in a way that challenges literal sense—the clock strikes just as Dromio is struck, the clock measures twelve, the next hour being one, the same 'one' is the punch Dromio receives. He makes a number of inferences that seem to be equally unrelated but are held together by the various meanings each word can have: his mistress is 'hot' in anger, which relates to the spoiled dinner and 'cold' meat, cold and uneaten because of Antipholus's absence. This is an example of délire's 'rich and imaginative' capacity. The line of sense is not quite lost: the structure is quite linear and the end returns to the beginning with the spoiled meat.

⁶⁸ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Recursion is the principle that allows complex sentences to be built by extending a phrase with another phrase, and so on. For example 'This is the cat that caught the rat that ate the barley that grew in the field...' For a discussion of recursion in Shakespeare, see Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, pp. 24-5.

This structure is, in the end, deceptive. The speech is nonsense because Dromio's mistress is actually not waiting for Antipholus as he is the wrong twin. The appearance of sense is qualified by the disappearance of sense.

2.3.2.5 *Twins Bound and Chained*

The puns in Dromio's speech display the structure of language in *délire* that both makes sense and nonsense.⁷¹ Within the chain of signifiers, the connections rather than the matter are foregrounded. It expresses a fundamental relation with bonds, joining and fracturing, and chains, of the ability to connect figuratively. Eric Langley describes each Dromio as being 'bound into the undecipherable causal developments of what feels like a terrifyingly tyrannical narrative sequence'.⁷² This consuming narrative of disorder is what Dromio's speech to Antipholus expresses.⁷³ Naturalistic causality and rational human agency are shown to be inadequate. Dromio often gives form to his experience by figuratively connecting seemingly unrelated events or objects in the same way that he himself is a victim of coincidence. Yet this ordering remains inefficient and doubtful. The undecipherability of Dromio's speech is a recurring theme throughout the play and is made in reaction to the events that take hold. At moments of intense confusion Dromio falls into what can be identified as *délire*:

Adr.	Tell me, was he arrested on a band?
S. Dro.	Not on a band but on a stronger thing: A chain, a chain! Do you not [hear] it ring? ^[74]
Adr.	What, the chain?
S. Dro.	No, no the bell, 'tis time that I were gone:

⁷¹ This is hardly surprising given that Shakespeare may be the origin of Lecercle's theory through Polonius's description of Hamlet: 'Though this be madness, yet there is | method in't' (II.2.205-6), a phrase that famously sees sense in nonsense and may well have formed the basis of '*délire*'.

⁷² Eric Langley, 'The Path to Which Wild Error Leads: A Lucretian Comedy of Errors', *Textual Practice*, Vol. 28, Issue 2, (2014), 161-87, p. 171.

⁷³ Langley, 'The Path to Which Wild Error Leads: A Lucretian Comedy of Errors', p. 171.

⁷⁴ 'hear' is from F3 whereas F1 has 'here'.

It was two ere I left him, and now the clock strikes one
(IV.2.49-54)

Dromio associates one thing with another in a way that others cannot grasp: Adriana is confused because she cannot understand how the chain can audibly ring. Dromio associates the word ‘band’ with a chain, being a ‘stronger thing’, and then refers to the bell that seems to mark a reversed temporal order, where two o’clock comes before one. As Langley states, ‘[t]hroughout the play, characters neurotically return to these declinations that insist on causal continuities and descending, dependent logic.’⁷⁵ This logic is only understood by Dromio; it is used by him alone and in an attempt to order and understand something, it confuses another. These linguistic chains express the confusion, panic and whirlwind speed of narrative events in the play. Specifically, the connections between these events are reflected in the object that the characters handle or search for: the golden chain.

Angelo the Goldsmith presents Antipholus Erotes with a ‘fair’ chain (III.2.181). The Goldsmith is linked to a Merchant financially, himself in a chain of debt, of borrowing and lending. He intends to collect the money from Antipholus to ‘discharge my bond’ to the Merchant (IV.1.14). Bonds extend beyond familial or friendship ties to include a much wider system of relations and financial dependencies. The monetary value of the chain, the fact that it is a source of continual exchange and financial obligation, might be thought to represent a form of proto-capitalism. Alternatively, however, the golden chain reflects and secures linkages between people. As Antipholus says to the Goldsmith: ‘Belike you thought our love would last too long | If it were chain’d together, and therefore came not’ (IV.1.25-6). The chain is itself a love token, commissioned by Antipholus of Ephesus to give to Adriana. The characteristics of the chain—long, thin and able to join one

⁷⁵ Langley, ‘The Path to Which Wild Error Leads’, p. 173.

thing to another—are mirrored in the second kind of chain that appears: the rope that at this moment Antipholus instructs Dromio to buy to ‘bestow | Among my wife and [her] confederates, | For locking me out of doors by day’ (IV.1.15-7). Two interchangeable symbols of binding appear in this scene: the precious gold chain supposed to express Antipholus’s love for his wife and the pedestrian, dull rope that like a gift is also to ‘bestow’, not in love and pleasure but in violence and punishment. When the focus shifts from the chain to the rope, the chain is symbolically supplanted by the rope, which thus takes on the connotations of its predecessor. The two symbols are themselves linked together by their sequencing.

Antipholus, expecting Dromio to enter with the chain, is confounded when Dromio of Ephesus enters with ‘a rope’s end’ (IV.4.15). This scene establishes the existence of the chain that the Antipholi, Dromios and the Merchant chase around in subsequent scenes. ‘Binding’ in the play takes on a darker meaning when Antipholus of Ephesus is bound at the instruction of his wife: ‘O, bind him, bind him, let him not come near me’ (IV.4.106). The physical bindings sever the marital bond and protect Adriana from the person to whom she has previously sworn a bond of love and protection. Through one type of binding the strength of other bonds are tested. The linking conceit is dramatically reproduced on the level of the plot in the commercial dealings of the artisans, courtesans and merchants of Ephesus, perhaps best symbolised by the frequent instances of binding and the appearance of ropes and chains, golden or otherwise. The physical chain that is exchanged and mistaken foregrounds the importance of human bonds in the play. The chain is symbolic of financial, romantic and familial relations, with the rope as their tense, violent counterpart. Bonds, chains and cords return to the first human tie: the umbilical cord, explored in chapter one. The pervasive discourse of linkages feeds the suspicion that

the twins' are indivisible. The textual errors, explored in the first section of this chapter, appear to suggest precisely this conclusion.

2.3.2.6 Bound Identity?

Bonds, in their various guises, are used to characterise the type of relationship between characters. Dromio is described as Antipholus's bondman where the bond of service is associated with the brotherly bond of the twin. Antipholus of Ephesus describes himself being chased and tied up: a 'rabble' of 'vild confederates...left me and my man, both bound together, | Till gnawing with my teeth my bonds in sunder, I gain'd my freedom' (V.1.236-51). The two men were tied together just as twins are, joined with cords, not forgetting they are themselves twins to other brothers.

Antipholus broke the bond using his own body in a birth-like moment, gnawing with his teeth as if breaking the umbilical cord and escaping the close proximity of Dromio. Because of the doubled identical twins, any concept of 'bond' operates in the shadow of these exceptional ties.

The meaning of 'bond' is explicitly taken further by Shakespeare. Egeon says to Antipholus 'is not that your bondman, Dromio' to which Dromio of Ephesus replies 'Within this hour I was his bondman, sir, | But he, I thank him, gnaw'd in two my cords: | Now am I Dromio, and his man, unbound' (V.1.288-91). Unbound and free, Dromio is liberated from servitude. Unbinding is a way of finding identity: 'Now am I Dromio' he declares. Yet to an extent this is an empty assertion as it begs the question: which Dromio? His identity is still bound to another as he is joined to his twin by invisible cords, the doubled self, with a connection that cannot be 'gnaw'd in two'. This is reminiscent of the enduring yet indefinite bond to the

mother tongue. The endurance of the biological bond is in tension with the twins' desire to forge their separate identities.

At this point in the play reflected appearance becomes important. Just as one of the unalterable characteristics of the twins is that they look identical, so Antipholus sees himself in the restrained Egeon: 'Ourselves we do remember, sir, by you; | For lately we were bound as you are now' (V.1.293-4). Self-recollection forms Antipholus's identity. It is significant that it is the image of a man tied which stimulates remembrance, prompting rumination on the metaphorical as well as literal bonds that restrain but also connect him to another. He seeks his identity by looking outwards at others, by seeing aspects of himself in others, because when he stares at his sibling, he sees himself. For the twins, identity is relational; the identity of one is both given to another and received from him. Dromio's 'Now am I', then, ultimately fails because there is no individual. The exclamation of the play is not an individual 'I am', it is 'I am because you are'. This sense of bound identity challenges the status of the individual. Egeon is the man who self-professedly 'cannot err', but this is just what he has done in referring to Antipholus as 'my only son' when he has two sons both called Antipholus (V.1.318, 310). Given, however, the radical vision of identity proposed there is a sense that Egeon does only have one son called Antipholus because the identity of both twins is non-individual.

From the beginning it is suggested that the twins wander in search of identity and the more they search the less they find: Antipholus of Syracuse says, 'So I, to find a mother and a brother, | In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself' (I.2.39-40). The inextricable tie between the twins is in the process of being tested. But though tested, it can never be broken, for when Dromio claims 'Now am I Dromio', though this seems like an urgent assertion of the self, his shared name undercuts this.

But is this a modern projection onto the text, encouraged by editors? As explored above, naming in the early playtexts is problematic and often fails to do its job of distinguishing characters and therefore clarifying identity. The insertion and correction of speech prefixes and names by editors allows identity to be conceived in the terms that we understand it—through names. Perhaps Shakespeare is demonstrating this fundamental point, that names—words that are attached to identities—are not as natural as they appear. We cannot recognise Dromio's assertion of identity, 'Now am I Dromio', because we cannot read it through his name. Attaching so much importance to a name and only being able to understand a character through their name is, at least in the early text of *The Comedy of Errors* a misreading. Shakespeare gave both sets of twins the same name for at least one reason: to let the confusion of identity proliferate. Egeon describes the Antipholi as follows: 'And, which was strange, the one so like the other | As could not be distinguish'd but by names' (I.1.51-2). They are so similar that only their names distinguish them, yet their names in the play, referenced by their speech prefixes, are at times confused. The very thing that is supposed to divide and understand the doubled doubles is, through the text, betrayed by more error. Yet to leave the names and speech prefixes uncorrected would have practical consequences for staging the play in the theatre. For the reader it may be more possible to leave the names uncorrected and allow those confusions and uncertainties to contribute to the meaning of the play.

Moments of self-assertion come with the Dromios once again:

S. Dro.	I, sir, am Dromio, command him away	
E. Dro.	I, sir, am Dromio, pray let me stay	(V.1.336-7)

'I am Dromio' becomes nothing more than a jocular rhyme as one assertion cancels out the other. The structure of the printed page, where one line follows another,

prohibits simultaneous reading, but in performance the two sentences could be spoken at the same time, clashing over the different three syllables in the middle of the sentence but reuniting with the end rhyme.⁷⁶ The Duke proposes a readerly understanding of the twins where one follows another: ‘One of these men is genius to the other: | And so of these, which is the natural man, | And which the spirit? Who deciphers them?’ (V.1.333-5). The ‘spirit’ is a derivative of the ‘natural’, original Dromio. Reading the text hierarchizes one twin above another whereas in performance there is at least the potential to convey an impression of coincidence. The identical nature of the twins is something the printed text cannot contain.

The indistinctness of the twins is emphasised at the end of the play. Discussing who is older and failing to agree, Dromio of Syracuse says ‘till then, | lead thou first’, to which Dromio of Syracuse responds ‘Nay then thus’ (V.1.423-4). ‘Thus’ gains meaning from a necessary gesture, perhaps a hand movement that encourages one brother to step forward, another moment that has more meaning onstage than in print. The twins exit at precisely the same time: ‘now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another’ (V.1.426), a moment which speaks to the inability of the Dromios to maintain an independent identity. Out of this chaos and confusion where names and by extension language fails, the Duke proclaims ‘I think you are all mated, or stark mad’ (V.1.282). Mated means confused or bewildered, but it also means married, matched or paired. Being joined, either to a twin or a spouse, is a kind of madness: both madness and ‘mating’ are a sacrifice of individuality, a loss of the self.

⁷⁶ There are further implications of this on language. For example, if two people speak at exactly the same pitch and speed, to everyone else it may seem as if only one person has spoken. To the two identical speakers they may only hear themselves speaking because their own voice cancels out the other.

2.3.2.7 *The Body in Error*

The Dromios, as servants who constantly make mistakes, are beaten for their errors. When Dromio (of Ephesus) protests he is told: ‘Good now, hold thy tongue’, to which he replies ‘Nay, rather persuade him to hold his hands’, referring to Antipholus of Ephesus (IV.4.23). Here tongues and hands are parts of the body equally capable of communication. Although the communication of the hands in this case may be primitive violence, it leaves a written language on Dromio’s body, and it foregrounds the importance of the body in communication. Language and the body intersect: ‘That you beat me at the mart, I have your hand to show; | If the skin were parchment, and the blows you gave were ink, | Your own handwriting would tell you what I think’ (III.1.12-14).⁷⁷ The words are Antipholus’s but the meaning or thought is Dromio’s. The marks and scars reveal their shared history. Ordinarily between twins the body records a shared history, through birthmarks and shared physical characteristics⁷⁸ but here the body records error—the consequences of ‘mistakes’ where Dromio returns when he is sent away, loses the gold he is given and fetches a rope when he is asked for a gold chain.

Such physical violence is used to characterise the relationship between Antipholus and Dromio. As Dromio explains, ‘I am wak’d with it when I sleep, rais’d with it when I sit, driven out of doors with it when I go from home, welcom’d home with it when I return’ (IV.4.34-7). In telling this story, Dromio suggests his bodily state of being is changed to its opposite. Narrativising his abuse in this way expresses his attempt to make sense of the nonsensical. Yet the form does not fit the content—order can be identified in the structure of his speech but the content

⁷⁷ Maps, reading and the body, relates back to Nell and her body as a map, discussed above.

⁷⁸ ‘Who deciphers them?’ asks the Duke looking at the twins, appropriating the editorial mode of sifting through, understand and making sense, decoding the data (V.1.335). It is as if their appearance and even being need to be converted into ordinary language rather than the special language of the twins.

remains impenetrable to reason as he cannot understand why he is beaten. In the end Dromio's attempt to order his experience fails and his speech is silenced with a beating: 'Wilt thou still talk? *Beats Dromio*' (IV.4.44 S.D.)

The body is not only subject to error but it also is the site of its resolution. The aptly named Doctor Pinch is ready with his torturous ways to restore order. Adriana instructs 'Good Doctor Pinch, you are a conjurer, | Establish him in his true sense again' (IV.4.47-8). Pinch pronounces that 'both man and master is possess'd; | I know it by their pale and deadly looks.' (IV.4.92-3). This deduction is based entirely on the body, on Antipholus and Dromio's visual appearance. In reaction, Antipholus says 'with these nails I'll pluck out these false eyes | That would behold in me this shameful sport' (IV.4.104-5). Antipholus claims he will blind himself with his own fingers. The scene has moved a long way from farce; indeed it chimes more with the tragedy of *King Lear* than with any other Shakespearean comedy.⁷⁹ Antipholus threatens to do what Cornwall does to Gloucester: to 'pluck' out his eyes. In one of the most gruesome scenes, Gloucester is blinded by the vengeful Regan and Cornwall. Cornwall horrifically proclaims 'Out, vild jelly! | Where is thy lustre now?' (III.7.83-4). Antipholus is bound by many others: 'Enter three or four, and offer to bind him; he strives' and Doctor Pinch calls for '[m]ore company! the fiend is strong within him', asking for yet more men to restrain him (IV.4.105 s.d-107). Like Antipholus, Gloucester is also bound at the excited command of his captors, where Cornwall says '[b]ind him, I say. [Servants bind him.] Regan: 'Hard, hard. O

⁷⁹ Jonathan Bate claims that '*The Comedy of Errors* turns on the essential device of farce'. See 'Introduction' to William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* ed. Jonathan Bate (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2011), p. 2. The play has historically been regarded as a farce and therefore is deemed essentially trivial. Farce, being close to slapstick comedy, relies on exaggerated visual, physical gestures and face-pulling. There are moments in *The Comedy of Errors* which use these techniques, especially surrounding the Dromios. The violence towards them, however, could be interpreted as tragically comic, as dark humour, with serious overtones rather than a glib acceptance of aggression. There are climactic moments of violence where the extremity of the language and action extend beyond comic entertainment, for example in the trial of Antipholus of Ephesus in Act IV Scene 4.

filthy traitor!’ (III.7.32-3). Within Act IV Scene 4 of *The Comedy of Errors*, characters are not acting comically as the play’s genre might predict. Pinch is often seen as a figure of fun, a quasi-schoolteacher and quack doctor drafted in by Shakespeare to perform a comic exorcism on Antipholus, yet his appearance from the beginning suggests otherwise. If Doctor Pinch is a farcical figure, the violence he inflicts in resolution of bodily errors is inconsequential. But on an alternative reading of Pinch, more akin to the equivalent scene in *King Lear*, the violence is not inconsequential, but the painful result of bodily error.

For Dromio when he is beaten and Antipholus when he is tied, their natural physical and vocal responses are omitted from the text. Their words are recorded but not their cries for help or involuntary bodily responses. Lecercle draws a distinction in language between ‘what we might call the “dictionary”, i.e. language as abstract, systematic, an instrument of communication, and the “scream”, i.e. language as material, individual, an expression of the passions and instinctual drive of the human body.’⁸⁰ ‘Material language, on the other hand, is unsystematic, a series of noises, private to individual speakers, not meant to promote communication and therefore self-contradictory’. Private languages and communication understood by only a few people, especially in familial units, is pertinent to *The Comedy of Errors* where the identical nature of the twins raises the possibility of thought and language that only they can follow. For Lecercle language is an integral part of the speaker’s body, an outward expression of its drives. At the same time it imposes itself on the individual, controlling the ‘subject’.⁸¹ Despite the agency of the body in moments of pain,

⁸⁰ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 44.

⁸¹ Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*, p. 44.

confusion or delirium, such noises and non-linguistic responses are not represented in the playtext.⁸²

Dromio of Ephesus asks Antipholus of Syracuse ‘for God’s sake, hold your hands! Nay, and you will not, sir, I’ll take my heels’. By taking his ‘heels’, he exits the scene because Antipholus will not stop beating him. Involuntary noises from the body are not recorded from the battery that takes place between these two sentences. This restrains the sympathy felt for the Dromios and prevents the play from turning into a tragedy, where the consequences of error are fully realised. In tragedy, ‘screams’ are released and the body is released to express itself. In *King Lear*, what does ‘howl howl howl’ signify (V.3.258)? Is it an imperative, an embedded stage direction, instructing a throaty inarticulate noise, or is Lear supposed to speak ‘howl’, or is it both? The same question arises with Othello’s ‘O! O! O!’ (V.2.197). They could sound softly like an owl or a coo at a baby just as easily as an elongated human cry, where the ‘o’ is steadily rearticulated, its pain and volume insistent. It has none of Lecercle’s ‘dictionary’ sense—it is an empty signifier. But this is the privilege of performance and the freedom of the actor, that in the moment of performance the actor decides how to speak (or scream). Eradicating the noises made by the body in response to violence not only restrains the horror of the aggression but suppresses its ‘screams’ and thus the delire of the character. The errors of the body are not restricted to the marks of the Dromios’ failures, or to Antipholus’s madness which Pinch seeks to ‘correct’, but extend to the screams, the projections of the body, which also express error. Lear and Othello emit these bodily noises at the moment they realise their tragic errors. On the other hand, in *The Comedy of Errors*, these ‘screams’ are suppressed and removed. This maintains the interpretation of the play

⁸² In performance it would be possible to represent them. My argument is focused here on the material text.

as a comedy.⁸³ The absence of these bodily errors prevents the comedy falling into tragic error. In this way, our categorisation of the play is facilitated.

2.3.3. Conclusion

Textual errors in *The Comedy of Errors* are not always insignificant. Yet some lead to a tangle of understanding that extends the theme of error that the play is interested in enlarging. Editing seeks to discipline and regulate: these editorial principles suppress the error found in *Errors* and are uniquely problematic to this play as error is fundamental to its being. The play challenges the definition that an error is worthless by raising it as a central issue to be surveyed and discussed. In turn, the textual expresses the conceptual: there is a synchronicity of error in the misleading speech prefixes and stage directions of the Dromios and Antipholi in the first Folio, as the play relies upon and actively constructs this kind of coincidental error. Instead of aiming to remove error we can use it to understand the play better; we can read with error rather than against it.

The play values error by casting it as wandering rather than mere mistake. It presents the wandering text: digressing from the correct text in its printerly mistakes and character confusions, while at the same time presenting characters that themselves are mistaken for each other or lost from themselves. Ultimately, the thematic error is taken further than the material error, destabilising and conflating the identity of the twins, and the delire that follows leads error towards madness and incoherence, but with a logic and coherence of its own.

The error of the play is characterised by wandering and digression, a form that invites non-correction. It is error ‘entertained’ as Antipholus of Syracuse

⁸³ For further discussion of error and the differences between comedy and tragedy, see chapter five, especially 3.5.1.

describes it (II.2.184-6). This approach to error as wandering rather mistake is developed further in *MSND*, discussed in the next chapter.

2.4. Wandering in the Wood: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play full of wanderers, loss, confusion and also, mistakes. In the wood, characters journey, treading paths amongst trees, bumping into each other and losing their way, metaphorically as well as physically. In this chapter I will build upon earlier discussion of error as wandering, current in early modern English.¹ Error as wandering and error as mistake are inextricably linked, most notably with the character of Bottom and his use of metaphor. Given the present-day sensitivity to error, an effect of the standardisation of the language, more attention needs to be paid to its sense of itinerancy rather than just its meaning as mistake.

This understanding of error as wandering reveals a close conceptual connection between error and metaphor. Metaphor encodes a dual signification: it is language in error in two ways. First, it uses words in ways that they do not mean. Straightforwardly, the language is mistaken: Juliet is *not* the sun. Recognition of the error of metaphor, of the ill-fit of the literal meaning, motivates an alternative, abstract reading. Secondly, metaphor is a wandering of sense: it wanders away from the standard, ordinary way of speaking, using a more semantically distant, even unexpected, signifier to convey meaning. Metaphor is not merely a mistake or malfunction of literal expression; it embodies error in the second sense of deviant meaning. This qualifies the normative assumption that error is wrong or bad. Instead error becomes a relevant and valuable means to generate complex meaning.

¹ From *errare* to wander. See *OED* <www.oed.com> [date accessed 20 January 2013]. Arnold Stein argues that in 'Paradise Lost', Milton uses the meaning of error as 'wandering' to evoke a prelapsarian world before the sinful error of the fall to come, whereas in the postlapsarian world error becomes a moral category. See Arnold Stein *Answerable Style: Essays on Paradise Lost* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1953), pp. 66-7 and Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 110.

Metaphor is one of Shakespeare's primary means of digression. Erasmus claims that in metaphor 'a word is transferred away from its real and proper signification to one which lies outside its proper sphere'.² As I suggested, metaphor is both literal incorrectness and semantic wandering. Contrary to commonsense imperatives to eradicate the mistake, error may have creative value. As in *Hamlet*, where indirection becomes a useful way of progressing as well as digressing – 'By indirections find directions out' (II.1.64) – so metaphor in *MSND* is erroneous in order to convey complex meaning.

In the first three sections of this chapter I argue that if we analyse the play in terms of what I call 'the methodology of metaphor' then a series of alternative readings are opened up, which consolidate our understanding of error as wandering and therefore as closely connected to metaphor. By referring to the *methodology* of metaphor, I mean to draw structural comparisons between the components of metaphor and themes and structures within the play. For example, metaphor is itself a misplacing, in that one concept takes the place of another: metaphor is the 'foreigner or "alien" usurping the place properly occupied by the original term', as Parker claims.³ Changing places and switching characters physically represent what is performed linguistically in metaphor. Literary devices are echoed in the characters; the relations between characters assume the structure of metaphor.

I emphasise two components of metaphor. First, its figurative digression embodies a form of semantic wandering. The meaning conveyed by metaphor digresses from the literal to the figurative by identifying a primary with a secondary subject. I then examine the concept of wandering at other moments in the play.

² Desiderius Erasmus, *Literary and Educational Writings 2: De Copia and De Ratione Studii*, ed. Craig Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), Vol. 24, p. 333.

³ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 37.

Section one explores the wood as a place of wandering. As a magical ‘green world’, it is a transformative space in which endless digression can occur, in addition to being a metaphor itself.⁴ Thus its translations can be understood through the methodology of metaphor. The wood is itself evoked by highly metaphorical language, which is constantly digressing, losing the practical thrust of speech that advances the plot, or expressing an idea in elaborate terms.

The second section addresses the movement of metaphor; not merely physical movement but the movement between literal and figurative that metaphor practises. I first address the physical movement of dancing, arguing that it recreates physically the digression of metaphor. I then investigate the metaphorical ‘movement’ between literal and figurative dialogue.

The second feature of metaphor to which I draw attention is the conflation of two separate entities: the primary and secondary subjects. By identifying them rather than drawing a literal comparison, the two objects are made more difficult to distinguish from one another. There are two structural counterparts to this aspect of metaphor in the play: Helena’s blurred vision through her ‘parted eye’, which represents a dual mode of perception, and the role of dream. Dreams are constituted by a combination of real elements, such as characters and objects, or at least their representations and an unreal world in which usual laws are no longer in operation.

The final section, rather than focusing on the structural features of metaphor and their counterparts in the play, analyses the use of metaphor to disturb further the assumption that error is mere incorrectness. This assumption is most applicable to the figure of Bottom, the character most ‘in error’ in the play. Through attention to his

⁴ The phrase ‘green world’ was first used by Northrop Frye in ‘The Argument of Comedy’, *English Institute Essays, 1948*, ed. D. A. Robertson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 58-73. This essay was incorporated into the third essay in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

use of metalepsis, a form of metaphor, we can see how his language is in fact expressive in much the same way as Puck's, who is verbally dexterous and poetically creative. Bottom is not just a blunderer; he is a user of metaphor. If we move away from a simplistic understanding of error as incorrectness and instead attend to its alternative meaning as a wandering we open up a new reading of Bottom's character, less as a blunderer and more as an unconventional proponent of metaphor. Metaphor in *MSND* is so closely related to error that it reformulates the understanding of error as incorrectness.

2.4.1 Metaphor

Before proceeding to the central arguments, however, we must first reach a more detailed theoretical understanding of metaphor. The structure of metaphor, with its movement of transformation, is important for understanding more than just language in the play; specifically, this symbolic structure of substitution and interaction applies also to the setting of the wood, which constantly resists interpretation as a literal space. Given the centrality of metaphor, any reading of the play is fundamentally affected by our conception of what metaphor is, so it will be useful to explore its theoretical foundations. The 'somewhat boundless field' of metaphor theory, as Paul Ricoeur phrased it, is not something that can be covered here but a brief summary aids understanding of the argument about how metaphor functions and its significance in the play.⁵

The etymology of metaphor is to bear, to carry, or to transfer.⁶ A metaphor applies words to a subject that literally apply to another subject—it has the ability to

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Autumn, 1978), 143-159, p. 143.

⁶ See *OED* at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 20 May 2013].

transfer meaning. Theories of metaphor can be divided into two types.⁷ The ‘comparison’ theory, originating from Aristotle, claims that metaphor involves a comparison or similarity between two subjects.⁸ Accordingly, a metaphor is a condensed or elliptic simile. Aristotle identifies it as a trope of resemblance: ‘[m]etaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else. The transference being either from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or on grounds of analogy’.⁹ The ‘semantic interaction’ theory argues that metaphor involves an interaction between the literal and figurative.¹⁰ This originates with I. A. Richards and has been developed by Max Black.¹¹ According to the theory, the tenor and vehicle or primary and secondary subjects interact. Properties of one subject are selected by the hearer and are used to understand a second subject which induces change in the second subject. Black’s claim is that the interaction involves ‘shifts in meaning of words belonging to the same family or system as the metaphorical expression’, found by some to be ‘scandalizing’.¹² He argues that ‘a metaphorical statement can sometimes generate new knowledge and insight by *changing* relationships between the things designated (the principal and subsidiary subjects.)’¹³

The ‘scandalizing’ idea that meaning is unstable is resisted by John Searle who finds certainty and stability in the ‘sentence meaning’ and loads the source of

⁷ In this classification I follow M. C. Beardsley, ‘The Metaphorical Twist’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1962, 22, 293-30 and John Searle, ‘Metaphor’, *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 83-111.

⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. R. Roberts in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), vol. 11.

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 1457b6-9.

¹⁰ Searle, ‘Metaphor’, p. 90.

¹¹ Max Black, ‘More About Metaphor’, *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19-41, p. 28.

¹² Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 45.

¹³ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, p. 35.

metaphoricity on the speaker and their intentions.¹⁴ He distinguishes between sentence meaning ‘which is never metaphorical, and speaker or utterance meaning, which can be metaphorical.’¹⁵ Both Searle and Donald Davidson assert that there is no modification of meaning in any of the elements of the metaphorical expression.¹⁶ They deny the central claim of the interaction theory of meaning that one or more of the subjects in the metaphor is changed.¹⁷ On the other hand, Black argues for an exchange of implications from one subject to another—what he calls a ‘parallel implication-complex’—which affects the tenor or primary subject and ‘induces parallel changes in the secondary subject’.¹⁸ For Black, there are two subjects of metaphor which are ‘active together’ and ‘interact’ to produce meaning. The primary subject or tenor ‘obtains a new meaning, which is not quite its meaning in literal uses, nor quite the meaning which any literal substitute would have’.¹⁹ This idea of emergent meaning has been recently developed by Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner into blending theory.²⁰

Blending theory moves away from the bilateral conceptualisation of tenor and vehicle, instead seeking a third way: the creation of new meaning when the subjects of the metaphor are brought together. It places emphasis on the imagination as an innovative force: ‘The products of conceptual blending are always imaginative and creative’, providing a useful tool for understanding the creativity of literary

¹⁴ Recent blending theory disagrees with this and does not see meaning as inherent in the ‘sentence’ or word. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner state: ‘The meanings of “father” are not properties of the word “father” but byproducts of the operation of conceptual integration and of the fact that words, like anything else attached to inputs, can be projected to blends.’ Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 143.

¹⁵ Searle, ‘Metaphor’, p. 90.

¹⁶ Searle, ‘Metaphor’ and Donald Davidson, ‘What Metaphors Mean’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Special Issue on Metaphor (Autumn, 1978), 31-47.

¹⁷ Whether something new is created when a metaphor is understood is a recurring question in the philosophy of metaphor. Andrew Ortony cites this question as a repeated theme of his volume. Ortony, ‘Metaphor, Language and Thought’, *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-16, p. 5.

¹⁸ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, p. 28.

¹⁹ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, p. 39.

²⁰ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

metaphors.²¹ These ‘inputs’ as Fauconnier and Turner name them, can be more than two and are not hierarchized as with ‘vehicle’ or ‘secondary’ being subservient to ‘tenor’ or ‘primary’ subjects.²² Although it might seem that blending theory fails to distinguish parts of metaphor and their precise relation to each other, in fact it acknowledges that this is not always possible and that there are inputs that affect the blend or others that are ignored.²³

The wood in *MSND* may be better understood through blending a mixture of inputs because vehicle and tenor merge, where dream and wakefulness become indistinct and destabilised. The centrality of metaphor in understanding the play’s magical world and the events that take place within it is recognised by Hippolyta. In her rejoinder to Theseus’s rejection of metaphor she demands that the power of metaphor and imagination be taken seriously:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigur’d so together,
More witnesseth than fancy’s images,
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable. (V.1.23-7)

Hippolyta claims that the shared experience of those in the wood, or the audience’s in the theatre, is something more serious and substantial than ‘fancy’s images’. The

²¹ Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, p. 6. For discussion of blending as applied to literature, see Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²² For example, blending theory would explain Helena’s metaphor that she and Hermia are ‘Two lovely berries moulded on one stem’ by stating that the women as fruit are a conceptual blend (III.2.211). Information about the two women and the berries exist in the ‘source space’ and some of that information is transferred into the ‘target space’ where the blend of that information occurs. The meaning of the metaphor is created by blending human characteristics with joined fruit. The blend includes abstract information that is taken as applying to both source and target, such as growing together, physical proximity and similarity of appearance. The inputs of close proximity and shared growth represent the emotional closeness between Helena and Hermia. It gives us a way to integrate the inputs into one blended image without erasing what we know of its independent inputs. There is selective projection, that is, not all aspects of the ‘berry’ domain enter into the metaphorical understanding of women as fruit.

²³ It is also possible for the blend to develop ‘emergent’ content of its own, beyond the information given by the subjects or input of the metaphor. This has been usefully discussed by Joseph Grady, Todd Oakley and Seana Coulson. See the discussion of ‘the surgeon is a butcher’, Joseph Grady, Todd Oakley and Seana Coulson, ‘Blending and Metaphor’, *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, eds. Raymond W. Gibbs and Gerard J. Steen, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), 101-24.

experience of the ‘story of the night’ can discover or create special truth in metaphor, an idea which Theseus rejects. For Hippolyta, metaphor must be the method of interpreting the night’s events because it leads to an understanding of ‘great constancy’ or consistency; in the face of such strange occurrences, refusing to read them as mere fancy is the only way that they are coherent.²⁴

2.4.2 The Wood

The wood as an allegory is used throughout literature. It is the enchanted place, an environment of escape. Dante opens the ‘Inferno’ of the *Divine Comedy* describing losing the way in a wood:

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to
myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.²⁵

Dante is of course not the only writer to employ the allegory of the wood, but he affords it a prominent status and symbolic power at the beginning of the poem.²⁶ It is used to suggest a hostile, confusing place in which the narrative voice finds itself. In its figurative interpretation, the wood is the self externalised: the narrator is lost from her own self, suggested by the loss of the ‘straight way’. The location of the literary text most often supports the object of the text’s discussion but rarely dominates it. Often the background affects but does not determine. Here, however, the wood is

²⁴ The *Riverside Shakespeare* interprets ‘constancy’ as ‘consistency, hence certainty’, p. 276.

²⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert Durling, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Canto 1, 1-2.

²⁶ Other texts that feature transformational, enchanted woods are: an English-language version, Henry Watson, *The hystory of the two valyaunte brethren Valentyne and Orson, sonnes vnto the Emperour of Grece* (London, 1555). Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Roche; Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as well as the tragic woods of *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus*; Robin Hood; *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, ed. Christopher Ricks, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989); Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, first published 1532), Ronaldo has lost his horse but the focus of the narrative forks off onto Angelica: ‘His flight much anger in *Ronaldo*: | But follow we *Angelica* that fled. | That fled through woods, and deserts all obscure, | Through places vninhabited and wast,’ Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso in English heroical verse, by Iohn Haringto[n]*, (London, 1591), The First Book, v.32-33, R.A iii at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 7 April 2013].

salient because it performs the larger symbolic function of the struggle of the narrator and the separation from the self.

Northrop Frye argues that the Shakespearean wood is a 'green world', interpreted not as a threatening wild but a location of benign imagination that sometimes conflicts with a harder reality.²⁷ The green world 'has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires. This dream world collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience, of Theseus' Athens with its idiotic marriage law'.²⁸ For Frye the wood is not just the place of desires, it is part of a teleological trajectory: 'the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.'²⁹ This interpretation corresponds with Dante's wood. It acts as a kind of 'purgatorio' with the characters returning to the 'real world' renewed and purified. The emphasis is on metamorphosis and the possibility of the return to the 'normal', which resonates with the resolution at the end of many of the comedies. Yet it renders the wood subordinate to the end of return and resolution; we are not allowed to linger and wander for its own sake, to embrace the Shakespearean wandering which often halts travelling through the metaphorical wood.

Jeanne Addison Roberts criticises Frye's 'green world' as being too positive and even more male: '[b]y defining his green world in association with dramatic genre, specifically with comedies and romances with happy endings, Frye predetermined that this world would be for him and his followers benign, harmonious, and restorative, bringing "innocent youths" together with receptive and

²⁷ Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 182.

²⁸ Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 182.

²⁹ Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 182.

comforting females.’³⁰ Instead, Roberts reads the Shakespearean green world in female terms. ‘[T]he Wild is the locale for the male’s necessary, seductive, and terrifying confrontation with the female, his braving of the perils of maternal regression and destructive erotic abandon in order to annex a woman into his cultural context.’³¹ This may well be one of the functions of the wood in Shakespeare, but as well as the gendered space there is a more general meaning of the wood as textual and cognitive, where getting lost, moving away from home, and taking unknown paths represent structures of writing and thought.³²

Charlotte Scott also offers a perspective on the wood based on its effect on the human. It is important, according to her, because of the types of behaviours that are licensed when a character steps into it. ‘The wood in *MSND*, like the forest in *Titus Andronicus*, is a space for the play’s action to retire into horror or fantasy: “double”, “dreadful”, “desert”, “ruthless”, “shadowy”, “indistinguishable” and “green”, this natural expanse secludes lovers and rapists, murderers and fairies.’³³ It may well be a place for characters to behave in a way that is unexpected in terms of Frye’s ‘normal’ setting but this is a conception of the wood as only auxiliary to character or plot. In a wider sense, however, the wood reflects the action of literary

³⁰ Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 24

³¹ Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild*, pp. 24-5.

³² If the gendered perspective and the forest were pursued further, it could be explored as an alternative female space, one that exploits the sense that the forest operates on a different temporality. Julia Kristeva discusses the rejection of linear temporality for women. She claims that ‘female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival—in other words, the time of history.’ Linear time is rejected in the forest, as it is for women. For Kristeva, this becomes a problem of history. Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* vol. 7 Issue 1 (1981), 13-35, p. 17.

³³ Charlotte Scott, ‘Dark Matter: Shakespeare’s Foul Dens and Forests’ *Shakespeare Survey*, (2011), 64, 276-89, p. 278. Scott understands the forest through the ways in which it was controlled by law, how it and its contents were seen as property, where those in power were constantly seeking to order a disordered space: ‘The hunter and the hunted shape the forest, and as long as they do it will remain a place of disorientation.’ (pp. 286-7). Interesting in relating the forest to sin: ‘The isolation or solitude often associated with the forest is partly derived from the idea that it is densely ‘shadowed’ or canopied, hidden not just from the human but, more significantly, ‘heaven’s eye’, both god and the sun.’ (p. 286) ‘In Christian terms, forests were representative of both error and separation and their wandering paths were a challenge to those who had strayed and erred to find salvation.’ (p. 288).

construction, as the text enables itself to take a wandering journey by representing a wandering journey.

In the early modern period the wood was also associated with the materiality of writing. Ben Jonson draws on classical literature in borrowing the symbol of the forest. He writes in his epigraph that *Timber or Discoveries* is:

A wood of things and of thoughts; as it were timber, so called from the multiplicity and variety therein contained. For just as we usually call a vast number of trees growing indiscriminately a wood, so also did the ancients call those of their books in which were randomly collected short works on various topics, “woods” and “timber-trees”.³⁴

The first sentence is a quotation from the Roman poet Statius’s *Sylvae*, a varied collection of poems.³⁵ Jonson employs *sylva* to describe the Renaissance phenomenon of commonplacing, using the metaphor of a forest to explain how diverse elements can stand next to each other in a single work. This trope is able to do the work that critics struggle with: to unite various, even chaotic parts. Thus, at least part of the function of the literary wood is to express disorganisation and chaos, just as the wood effects such confusion in *MSND*.³⁶

Jonson uses Statius’s epigraph in *Underwood*, another poetry collection whose title is evocative of woodland.³⁷ Similarly Jonson’s *The Forrest* is a miscellaneous collection of fifteen short poems, odes, epistles, and songs.

Discoveries or Timber exists in the tradition of Renaissance *silva*, which includes Francis Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarvm: or A Naturall Historie* (1626), Phineas Fletcher’s

³⁴ Jonson, *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, eds. Bevington, Butler and Donaldson, vol. 7, p. 497.

³⁵ Statius’s title perhaps acknowledges a debt to Lucan’s lost ten books of *Silvae*, interestingly suffering from the literal effect of being lost in the forest.

³⁶ Thomas Cooper defines *sylva* not only as ‘a woodde’ but also as ‘store of mattier digested together’. The significance of matter being considered simultaneously directly relates to metaphor in the way that it too brings together concepts to be considered in unison and affecting each other. Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (1578), Hhhhhh.r. See *EEBO* at <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 16 September 2013].

³⁷ In ‘To the Reader’, *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, eds. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 7, p. 497.

Silva Poetica (1633), Abraham Cowley's *Sylva, or Divers Copies of Verses Made upon sundry occasions* (1636), and John Dryden's *Silvae* (1685). Thomas Fortescue used the idea of the forest in his title without making reference to *sylva* or *silva* in his translation of Pedro Mexia's *The foreste or Collection of histories* (1571). The work is a collection of essays addressing such diverse topics as 'Why in the firste Age men liued longer, then in this our Age present' and 'How detestable a matter Crueltie is, with somme examples seruinge to that pourpose',³⁸ again following the tradition of heterogeneous subjects being held together. The strength of the trope of the forest is such that it is here used as synonymous with the literary matter of a 'collection of histories'. Later works such as John Evelyn's *Sylva or a discourse of forest-trees* (1670) shifted the meaning of *sylva* to refer literally to forests, but in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century the word was used according to the classical tradition, referring to a genre defined by the collection of heterogeneous texts.

One property of *silva* is to be raw or unpolished. Quintilian uses it in the sense of 'raw material' to describe a rough draft or rapidly written piece.³⁹ This sense is carried into the early modern period in Sir Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* (1538) which defines 'sylua' as a 'wodde or place ouergrowen with wedes, also any matter hastily written with oute studye.'⁴⁰ The trope unites not only widely diversified and even chaotic thought but also extempore, rough thought which is expressive of disorder in its unpolished nature and thus sets up a classic opposition of nature to culture. The trope of the wood is an organising principle: it holds together these diverse elements, mirroring the form of the work itself. The wood also represents a way of reading errantly: the reader must constantly have in mind the yoking of

³⁸ Mexia Pedro, *The foreste or Collection of histories*, trans. Thomas Fortescue (1571), p. 1 Sig.A r. and Sig.Kii v. See *EEBO* at <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [date accessed 7 April 2013].

³⁹ Quintilian *The Orator's Education*, ed. Russell, 10.3.17.

⁴⁰ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Dictionary of Syr Thomas Eliot Knyght*, (London, 1538), Sig.BV r.

distinct elements made possible by the presence of the wood. The wood expresses the diversification, unplanned, wandering content, and potentially dense and unmapped landscape of the *silva* tradition. The trope signifies dense, potentially confusing and variegated content, which the wood embodies as a place of confusion.⁴¹

MSND is paradigmatic of *As You Like It*. In the Forest of Arden, Shakespeare even more explicitly draws together literary production and the wood through Orlando's scattering of the material object that connects them: paper. Orlando writes his poetry and fastens or carves it into the trees of the forest: 'Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love...O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books, | And in their barks my thoughts I'll character' (III.2.1-6). Leaves of paper hang as foliage; trees become a type of book in which Orlando will read or write messages addressed to another. He colonises the forest's language of natural signs with civilising poetry and its formal rules:

Why should this a desert be?
For it is unpeopled? No:
Tongues I'll hang on every tree,
That shall civil sayings show

(III.2.120-2)

Nature and culture are collapsed as the 'desert' of the countryside meets the court through literacy and the written word. Through Orlando's efforts, language becomes an adornment of trees, and he wants to turn the whole forest into a place of written language. In turn, Rosalind and Touchstone apply the rules of poetry, of decorum, rhythm, rhyme and received standards of taste, to Orlando's verses. Touchstone criticises Orlando's style for having a repetitive rhyme (III.2.96-8) declaring that 'Truly, the tree yields bad fruit' (III.2.116), while Rosalind objects to its rhythm:

⁴¹ Thomas Cooper brings together wandering and the forest when quoting the 'approved phrase' 'Errare in sylua. Virg. To walke abroade in the woode.' *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1584), Sig.V v.2. This entry shows error in the forest to be an accepted trope.

‘some of them had in them more feet than the verses would bear’ (III.2.165-6).

Touchstone’s description of Orlando’s poetry as the ‘bad fruit’ of the tree extends the metaphor of the forest as a place of digressive language. The forest is not merely a place in which errant or bad language can flourish: the trees of the forest actively grow it.

Walking is used as a metaphor for poetic rhythm through their shared ‘feet’, meaning both a metrical foot as a rhythm of verse and a foot as the means of walking.⁴² Rosalind says ‘Ay, but the feet were lame, and could not bear themselves without the verse, and therefore stood lamely in the verse.’ (III.2.169-5). Feet are used to identify the aesthetic boundaries of the poem: the poem is aesthetically bad because ‘the feet were lame’. The lameness of the feet identifies a further semantic limit, figured as a geographical boundary, demarcating where the poetry can (or cannot) wander. At the same time feet express the musicality of that movement through the rhythm of language. The characters, in turn, can move or dance to the versified feet. Feet bear the weight of the body and this symbolism extends to feet as vehicles of semantic content: a basic interaction of form and content. The rhythmical foot carries semantic meaning just as the characters’ peregrinate journeys are a metaphor of semantic digression.

In narrative theory, the concept of the wood has become central to the understanding of the narrative text itself.⁴³ For Umberto Eco ‘[w]oods are a metaphor

⁴² The triangulation of dance, verse and discourse through feet occurs in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. The King of Navarre, disguised as a Muscovite, claims to have travelled far to talk with the Princess of France: ‘we have measured many miles | To tread a measure with her on this grass.’ (V.2.184-5) Measuring a stride is a metaphor for walking, one the King extends to Katherine in an attempt to both dance and discourse with her.

⁴³ George Steiner finds the metaphorical landscape useful as a way of conveying a complex shift in meaning or understanding: ‘The mind leaves one major door of perception, one high window, and turns to another. The landscape is seen in a fresh perspective, under different lights and shadows, in new contours and foreshortenings. Features that were salient now appear to be secondary or are recognised as elements in a more comprehensive form. Details hitherto unobserved or casually grouped assume a dominant focus.’ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (London: Faber, 1972), p. 172.

for the narrative text, not only for the text of fairy tales but for any narrative text.’⁴⁴

The metaphor of the wood and its nexus of paths is fruitful for Eco: ‘Even when there are no well-trodden paths in a wood, everyone can trace his or her own path, deciding to go to the left or to the right of a certain tree and making a choice at every text encountered.’⁴⁵ The wood is a metaphorical representation of a text, with well-trodden paths that are clear and straight, paths that fork offering a choice of route, and a main thoroughfare that is the central plot of the play. The straight road with signposts is suggestive of plain speaking and designed to be immediately understood, whereas the wilderness is unexplored and uncertain. Straight lines are straight talk; curved paths are meandering digressions. Greenblatt discusses this kind of spatialised movement in relation to cross-dressing and heterosexuality, theorising movement in Renaissance drama through what he terms ‘swerving’.⁴⁶ The representation of wandering in the wood reflects the action of literary construction.

An important aspect of the figure of the wood is that it is spatialised. It is a complex network of interlocking paths, creating the possibility of endless digression and tangential wandering. This spatial characterisation makes the wood an apt metaphor for metaphor itself. Moreover, the wood is frequently spatialised as unfamiliar; the implication of taking a deviant path is loss and disorientation. This models another aspect inherent to metaphor: its errancy. The proliferation of spatial paths recreates the reader’s role in interpreting texts. The reader’s autonomy is enhanced; she must make continual decisions about meaning as the potential paths open up. As Eco argues, choice in the symbolic wood is relevant not only to the writer and the character but also to the reader: ‘In a narrative text, the reader is forced

⁴⁴ Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁴⁵ Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Discussed in more detail in Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 68-93.

to make choices all the time.’⁴⁷ As the characters linger in the wood, so readers can wander and linger or pass through quickly.

Once both the characters and readers are in the ‘green world’ in these plays, the idea of ‘progress’ towards something is dropped, replaced with a kind of ‘taking place’ or ‘wasting time’. In *As You Like It* Charles says of Duke Senior’s band of ‘merry men’ in the forest of Arden: ‘many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world’ (I.1.115-9). ‘Fleeting’ is to slip away or to fade, to while away time in ‘golden’ and ‘green’ worlds, both extraordinary spaces. The relation of time to space is important here since the ‘green world’ is a kind of suspension of time, a world held between two moments of linear time. Consequently, time becomes elastic and controllable: Puck boasts, ‘I’ll put a girdle round about the earth | In forty minutes’ (II.1.175), referring to the speed at which he can travel by exceeding all possible restraints of time.

In the green worlds – and this is true of many Shakespearean plays – there is a literal ‘inter-regnum’, during which people have time to live beyond rituals. For example, the band in the forest in *As You Like It* live in ‘woods more free from peril than the envious court’ (II.1.4), or Prospero’s existence on the island, where, as he says to Miranda, ‘I have nothing, but in care of thee’, in comparison with his role as ‘Duke of Milan and a prince of power’, twelve years previously (*The Tempest*, I.1.16, 54). The green world suspends time, replacing it with space; but with the effect of giving two different kinds of time: one marked by ‘progress’ between two points in a linear trajectory, the other indifferent to any passage of time, pointless but

⁴⁷ Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, p. 6. ‘the three components of the narrative trinity—the model author, the narrator, and the reader... They must appear together because the model author and the model reader are entities that become clear to each other only in the process of reading, so that each one creates the other.’ (p. 24) Eco claims that the author, the narrator and the reader combine together to create the text, but this omits the editor—the silent corrector, those who put the material text together, correct and emend its content.

fun because it lets characters find a self that is divorced from social role. The framing of reality by linear time is a particular product of the city, and there is an alternative world where different temporal realities, and even different selves, are possible. As Orlando says in *As You Like It*, ‘there’s no clock in the forest’ (III.2.301), emphasising the distinction between the different temporal orders that characterise the two worlds.⁴⁸

2.4.2.1 *The Wood in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’*

Shakespeare draws heavily on the tradition of the metaphorical wood in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.⁴⁹ Its special prominence is reinforced by the number of times the word ‘wood’ occurs: seventeen, by far the most numerous in all Shakespearean drama. I want to pay attention to the foreground of the wood, which will involve understanding it as a literary function because of its relation to the wandering mind or discursive sentence; it is a metaphor of writing and speaking itself. The action of moving through a space, of putting one foot in front of another, is analogous to following a sentence or trail of thought. Both are linear and are liable to have paths forking away from them down which an author (or reader) might be

⁴⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan claims that the relation between space and place is defined by time, the difference between movement and pause: ‘What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.’ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6. For Tuan the ‘pause’ of place is seen as a conditional permanence by David Harvey: ‘entities achieve relative stability in both their bounding and their internal ordering of processes creating space, for a time. Such permanences come to occupy a piece of space in an exclusive way (for a time) and thereby define a place—their place—(for a time).’ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 261. For Tuan place is valued space. For Harvey, place is constructed out of space in a political economy under capitalism.

⁴⁹ This tradition is continued by Milton who constructs a place of ‘forests and enchantments drear, | Where more is meant than meets the ear.’ (ll.119-20) Magical language combined with the allegorical forest creates an excess of meaning. John Milton, ‘Il Penseroso’, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* ed. M. H. Abrams, (New York; London: Norton, 1993), p. 1449.

tempted.⁵⁰ In *MSND* the background is foregrounded because it is only this liberated space that licences such playful wandering and mistake.

The wood has this power because of its unique position away from the city of Athens and is therefore cut off from courtly, civilised culture and its state-driven control. This is discussed in the introduction at 0.2.1. The deviation from the city to the wood, from the cluster of associations of the city as correct, normal and standard, to its counterpart of the wood as wrong, erratical and subversive, manifests itself in the power of language. Language also adopts this wandering, open sense: because the words spoken in *MSND* are located in the margin rather than the centre, signification becomes ‘more contradictory, more extravagant and incontinent, than those allowed to manifest themselves within the city gates’.⁵¹ If we read language by reference to its marginalised place of utterance, the figurative power of metaphor to change and translate meanings has the ability to control plot and character literally. For example, Bottom is literally turned into a donkey. Thus the metaphor that he is an ass is a trope that Shakespeare makes work literally and figuratively. In another act of transformation, the love potion that Puck applies to the eyes of Lysander is the drug of metaphor: the ability to make him magically ‘see’ things in a different way (II.2.78-81). As Raphael Lyne claims, the play ‘poses unusual challenges, because it involves metaphorical images and manipulations of reality as part of its plot and its world and not just as part of its language.’⁵² Through the liberated and magical space of the wood, metaphor gains a determining power rather than being an ornamental feature.

⁵⁰ Modern corollaries are Italo Calvino, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Garden of Forking Paths’ *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Donald A. Yates, (New York: New Directions, 2007), pp. 19-29; Robert Frost, ‘The Road Not Taken’, *Robert Frost: Collected Prose, Poems and Plays* (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 103.

⁵¹ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 31.

⁵² Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cogniton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2011), p. 131.

The wood in *MSND* is often perceived as a place where characters undergo metamorphosis.⁵³ C. L. Barber writes ‘[t]he woods are established as a region of metamorphosis, where in liquid moonlight or glimmering starlight, things can change, merge, melt into each other. Metamorphosis expresses both what love sees and what it seeks to do’.⁵⁴ This critical convention recognises the metamorphosis of the characters but has yet to be applied to the figurative language of the play. The metaphorical language throughout the play provides a different perspective on the theme of metamorphosis, as well as transfiguration and translation, which occurs in the wood. The wood is both a physical and metaphorical space, which feeds into the conception of error and the destabilisation of its meaning as that which is mistaken.

The temporal world of the forest licenses the suspension of the chronological progression of the play in order for deviant, wandering metaphors to take over. Chains of metaphors are frequent, expressing and emphasising the displacement and substitution of the characters. For example, Lysander says to Helena:

And touching now the point of human skill,
Reason becomes the marshal to my will.
And leads me to your eyes, where I o’erlook
Love’s stories written in love’s richest book

(II.2.125-8)

This is a tumble of metaphors: ‘touching’ the ‘point of human skill’ mixes a physical with an abstract property. ‘Reason’ becomes a ‘marshal’ or controller of Lysander’s desires, which ‘leads’ him in a metaphorical sense. In Helena’s eyes are symbolically

⁵³ The ‘Heath’ in *King Lear* is the inverse of the Shakespearean wood—a bare, open space where things that are concealed and confused are laid naked. The wood in *MSND* is only referred to as such, whereas in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare uses both ‘wood’ and ‘forest’. The nature of the ‘forest outside Rome’ is radically different: while the wood in *MSND* is digressive, transformative and sometimes dangerous, the forest in *Titus* is fully destructive and without language. Aaron says to Demetrius and Chiron: ‘The forest walks are wide and spacious; | And many unfrequented plots there are | Fitted by kind for rape and villany’ (II.1.114-6). The forest is a place of error of a sinful kind that is a wandering away from God, where horrific crimes can be committed ‘shadow’d from heaven’s eye’ (II.1.130). Unlike the wood in *MSND* which is literary on a variety of levels, the forest in *Titus* is a place without language. It is ‘dreadful, deaf and dull’, where Lavinia is eventually violently silenced by having her tongue cut out (II.1.128). The wood and its victims cannot testify to their crimes. This tragic wood is a very different space from that of romance and comedy found in *MSND*.

⁵⁴ C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 133.

‘written’ ‘love’s stories’, the metaphor of which is extended by her eyes containing ‘love’s richest book’. Helena also controls a complex bundle of metaphors. Speaking of Demetrius she says:

He hailed down oaths that he was only mine,
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt. (I.1.243-5)

The hail, being the style in which Demetrius conveyed oaths to Helena, is transformed from a verb to a noun in order for the ‘hail’ to be vulnerable to Hermia’s figurative ‘heat’. The ‘hail’ of oaths becomes ‘showers’ that ‘melt’, representing Demetrius’s change in affection, working under the trope of love as fire. Both Lysander’s and Helena’s speeches jump around from one image to the next, barely pausing before the meaning is transformed by another concept.⁵⁵ Metaphor, in this sense, makes disparate concepts similar by shrinking the distance between them. As Brian Cummings observes, ‘Shakespeare’s line travels great distances and merges ideas together.’⁵⁶ This sense of wandering and compressed meaning pushes language to the edges of coherence: ‘Shakespeare appears to stretch the sense so far that we strain to reach it.’⁵⁷ As the characters journey to the point of collapse, their language covers even greater distances.

Puck has the greatest ability to govern and control language in this way, to shrink conceptual distance easily, suggested by his claim to ‘put a girdle round about the earth | In forty minutes’ (II.1.175). As the following passage demonstrates, Puck brings together diverse concepts figuratively but perhaps also literally given his magical abilities:

⁵⁵ Anne Barton makes the interesting observation that *MSND* is full of lists: ‘Almost all the characters are given to list-making’. She claims ‘the lists in Shakespeare’s comedy create the sense of a country world that is inexhaustibly rich and various, occasionally grotesque, but basically fresh, creative, and young.’ Anne Barton ‘The Synthesizing Impulse’ *Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 7-13, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁶ Brian Cummings, ‘Metalepsis’ in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217-233, p. 219.

⁵⁷ Cummings, ‘Metalepsis’, p. 219.

I jest to Oberon, and make him smile
 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
 Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;
 And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl
 In very likeness of a roasted crab,
 And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
 And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.
 The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
 Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
 Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
 And 'Tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;
 And then the whole choir hold their hips and loffe,
 And waxen in their mirth, and neeze and swear
 A merrier hour was never wasted there.

(II.1.42-58)

Here Puck pulls together a disparate group of images, suggesting his contrary nature and his ability for infinite or magical change. Despite the speed at which he moves from one to another his description is detailed and precise. The horse he figuratively turns Oberon into is 'fat' and 'bean-fed', and Puck does not just imitate a horse's neigh but specifically one of a 'filly foal'. He assumes the figure of a crab apple and bobs against the lips of a gossip, making her spill her drink down her 'withered dewlap', the wrinkled skin of her throat that pendulously hangs. Next he conjures the image of a 'threefoot stool', and then describes the delight of a whole company of people who 'hold their hips and loffe, | And waxen in their mirth, and neeze' as he whisks away the stool, making the wise woman fall on the floor. This is one of Shakespeare's many digressions in the play, moving in a whirl through a mixture of precise images, where something could be said with more brevity but without the detail or ponderousness. These digressions are readily conceptualised with reference to the symbol of the wood. Puck's story takes different paths, moving around, making distant things close.

These examples of Shakespeare's metaphorical language in *MSND* reveal the wood as part of what, in the introduction, I referred to as the methodology of metaphor. The wood, as a place of digression and wandering, follows the pattern of

metaphorical expression. The characters, as the examples of Puck and Lysander demonstrate, express themselves in a way commensurate with their surroundings: winding, indirect and metaphorical.

2.4.2.2 The Primacy of Place

As I have argued, the wood is established as a place of wandering. Significantly the first words spoken in the ‘wood near Athens’ are ‘Whither wander you?’ to which a Fairy responds ‘Thorough flood, thorough fire, | I do wander everywhere’ (II.1.1, 5-6). We are immediately given a sense of liberated, unrestricted moving. As well as the mythical beings, wandering in the wood is formative for the four lovers, Helena, Lysander, Demetrius and Hermia, who move through the green wildness looking for each other. Hermia and Lysander agree to meet in the wood (I.1.214-25) while Demetrius runs away from Helena and in search of Hermia (II.2.84-5). Lysander wakes and begins to pursue Helena leaving Hermia abandoned in the wood (II.2.108-13), before Demetrius manages to find Hermia (III.2.43-81). Lysander and Helena stumble across Demetrius and both men attempt to persuade Helena that they love her. The entrances and exits of the characters intensify in frequency and the reversals of desire are aided by Puck. Once the four are reunited they tell each other stories offstage while they wander through the wood to meet the Duke: ‘Let’s follow him. And by the way let’s recount our dreams’; even offstage the wandering does not stop (IV.1.199). Movement in and through the wood is more significant than it at first seems: the wood ‘encourages’ wandering, it is a determining force rather than a passive setting.

The effects of place and space have been emphasised by Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, which argues that space is actively produced by society—it

is not inherited from nature and it is not a neutral container. Similarly, the radical geographer David Harvey sees place as only ever a social construct that has a discursive meaning beyond that of location.⁵⁸ These are, perhaps, the kind of semantics associated with the description of the dramatic ‘setting’: as a container of action, either onstage or imaginative, which merely enables the action to take place rather than participates in it. I argue that this is not the form of space in *MSND*. The space of the play, the wood outside Athens, is reactive and influential.

There are other locations in the play that fade into the background and barely interfere with the plot, such as the court of Theseus’s palace. It remains attenuated; it is the ground on which the characters make their play rather than having a more dynamic role. Indeed there is no mention of ‘Theseus’s palace’ or the court in the play. The city of Athens where the palace is located is only a place to journey away from, into the digressive wood. Hermia describes it thus: ‘from Athens turn away our eyes | To seek new friends and stranger companies’, away from the city into the unknown and exciting wood (I.1.218-9). Conversely, the location of the wood is significant: for the lovers as an escape (I.1.214-7); for Titania with her rich descriptions and her place within it (II.1.81-117); for Oberon in his description of Titania (II.1.249-67); for Puck in his ‘wanderings’ round and about the wood (II.2.66-83); for the actors who find ‘a marvail’s convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house’ (III.1.2-4); for Hermia who emphasises her travels and travails through it, who ‘can no further crawl, no further go’ (III.2.444); or for Theseus who comes to the wood with Hippolyta to watch the hunt, to ‘hear the music of my hounds’ (IV.1.106). This

⁵⁸ David Harvey argues that ‘Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct. This is the baseline proposition from which I start. The only interesting question that can then be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?’ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 293-4.

salience alone suggests that the location is more than merely the background. It is an active and determinating feature of the play; it is a place outside of political control, where unmonitored events can occur, and possesses magical properties that drive events in the play.

The lovers are constantly searching through the wood, as if seeking their place. But, on another level, getting into the right place by wandering in the wood is concerned with aesthetic formalism that strives for a kind of classical beauty of order through symmetry. The characters' place, in this sense, is more important than their agency and desire. The remedying of desire has everything to do with aesthetic form rather than with 'love', that strange word that floats around the play without a clear meaning. For example, after declaring his strong feelings for Hermia (I.1.156-68), Lysander later rejects his position: 'then I do repent | The tedious minutes I with her have spent | Not Hermia but Helena I love' (II.2.111-3). His love for Hermia is 'Melted as the snow' (IV.1.166). Similarly Titania, awakening, declares to Bottom, 'On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.' (III.1.141), only to claim in disbelief in the next act 'Methought I was enamor'd of an ass' (IV.1.77). The ridiculousness of falling in love with a half-donkey is emphasised by the speed with which Titania falls out of love. For several of the characters the 'love' they have for each other vacillates between attraction and repulsion. Such patterning upsets the expectations of a character-focused reading. The 'identity' of these comic characters is not located in an interior selfhood but is deferred, existing only through the relationships with other characters. The implication is that identity is not synonymous with the person whose identity it is, but is constructed by the formal patterns of relationships in the play. This mode of characterisation is in contrast with what we find in tragedies where there is a deep-seated character investment: eponymous characters become

much more common, for example with *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. In these plays the agency of an individual forces the shape of the play.⁵⁹

Compared to these eponymous tragedies, *MSND* effaces the characters of the lovers by removing their agency and depth: they have no control over their fate; even Puck exercises greater influence on whom they fall in love with. It is not where a character walks or what she does when she gets there that matters but that she walks at all: it is a play of journeys not destinations. The entire play is made up of characters' journeys and travails through the wood, symbolically undertaking journeys of self-discovery, gaining and losing identity, or playing. The sense of place in *MSND*, therefore, is dominant. It is not a mere facilitator of actions, but seems to be an actor itself, by encouraging wandering and digression. We saw in the previous section that it shapes the characters' metaphorical language, but here we see that its influence extends further, subordinating the agency of the lovers to the wood's imperative to wander.

2.4.2.3 Wandering Identities

We saw in chapter three that in *The Comedy of Errors* wandering precipitates a loss of identity. An equivalent argument can be made here about *MSND*. Character identity is relational and losing one's way in the wood becomes a further loss of the self. Here we find a further extension of the methodology of metaphor, where it is the identity of individuals that digresses in the wood.

Titania describes the wood thus: 'the quaint mazes in the wanton green | For lack of tread are undistinguishable' (II.1.99-100). The wood is a place in which

⁵⁹ For further discussion of this idea see Docherty, *On Modern Authority*, pp. 90-128. *King Lear* dominates the plot through the enormity of his character that in its inhumanity verges on the monstrous. In comparison with *MSND*, the level of the characters' determination over the play-world is much less; the desires or action of no single character determines the play.

distinctions are lost. Getting lost and being mistaken are synonymous in the wood; existence in the green world is a confused 'misprision'. When Puck meddles in the desires of the wrong couple, Oberon accuses him: 'Of thy misprision must perforce ensue | Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true' (III.2.90). The four characters are all often lost and mistaken, one being a signifier of the other.

Wandering precipitates a kind of self-mistaking, further exaggerated by the similarity between the couples as they slip in and out of each other's identity. Being lost in the wood makes them forget who they are—Hermia asks 'Am not I Hermia? are not you Lysander?'—and who they are in love with: Lysander says to Demetrius 'you love Hermia; this you know I know' (III.2.163). Love, or more accurately desire, is itself conceived of as a wandering journey by Demetrius: 'My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourn'd, | And now to Helen is it home return'd' (III.2.171-2). Shakespeare plays with a loss of direction and self, soliciting the figure of a woman to signify the return home.⁶⁰ It is not important to end up with the 'right' partner, the point is that they partner. As long as the pairings take place, there is no 'right' partner because they can always try again with someone else. It gives us an idea of *eros* as error, the kind of *eros* that has the potential to go spectacularly wrong in *Othello*. Yet this slippage between the four lovers is mocked by Shakespeare: 'Yet but three? Come one more; | Two of both kinds make up four' (III.2.437). They are identity-less; it is simply a kind of numerical balancing. Wandering destabilises identity in other ways. Hermia admits 'I can no further crawl, no further go; my legs can keep no pace with my desires' (III.2.445). If wandering is a metaphor for the loss and discovery of identity, then here the self fragments along with the body with the feet and head desiring both rest and movement.

⁶⁰ Discussed by Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 68-93.

A discourse of wandering is also transferred to the meaning of language:

Lysander says to Hermia, ‘Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood; | And to speak troth, I have forgot our way’ (II.2.35). Speaking the truth is evoked in relation to wandering and finding ‘the way’ in the ‘wanton green’. The idea of plain speaking is challenged through the location of the wood and the action of wandering. In trying to reject her, Demetrius says to Helena ‘Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair? | Or rather do I not in plainest truth | Tell you I do not [nor] I cannot love you?’ (II.2.199-200). The wanderings and misunderstandings constantly refute the idea of ‘plain’ language and ‘plain’ truth, compounded by Helena’s answer ‘And even for that do I love you the more’ (II.2.202). This is a perverse world where the opposite of what is said becomes true; those who speak plainly say complex things.

Following Puck’s voice, Lysander is further misled. The rhetoric of plainness intersects with metaphors of movement: ‘I will be with thee straight’, says Lysander (III.2.403). Plain talking of taking the straightest, most direct route, is echoed in Puck’s retort ‘follow me then to plainer ground’, tempting him to step out of the confusion, the ‘ground’ being the ‘field’ of discourse as well as the wood floor (III.2.404). But we know that such a hope is impossible, given the world of the play and the deceit behind the promise: Lysander believes he is chasing Demetrius, not Puck. Lysander says, ‘When I come where he calls, then he is gone... That fallen am I in dark uneven way’ (III.2.414, 417). In the darkest scene of the play suddenly we are given a sense of the night—darkness and danger is an undercurrent of the play just as it is a subtext of the title. The wood quickly changes from the potentially pleasant experience of meandering to the frightening experience of losing one’s way and one’s self.

2.4.3 Movement

2.4.3.1 *Dancing as (Literary) Movement*

The journey is the logic of the play, but this is not the only form of movement: dancing is a style of movement that is repeatedly referenced. It is the conventional testing of partners allowing a brief interchange with each person before legitimately moving on to the next. Yet it is less the sociology of dance and more its aesthetics that are useful in considering *MSND* and its ordering of bodies. Dancing is a patterning of movement with a formalised symmetry: the partners imitate each other in their steps.⁶¹ If they dance in a pair they mirror each other face to face. Trying a different partner is done in front of the previous partner as people move around the room, circulating through the space. Circles are crucial in considering the form of movement and the ordering of bodies in dancing in the play.⁶² As Titania says, they ‘dance in our round’, the round being a set of cyclical movements that make up a dance, but alternatively the group as a whole as they dance in a circle (II.1.140).⁶³ In doing so, the movement fashions the space or plot into a circle—both visibly in the circular movements and invisibly because the ring of dancers creates a dividing line beyond which observers cannot step. This control of space and ritualised partnering—testing while moving—occurs with the dance of exchange as the lovers move through the wood. They take formalised steps, partner, break and re-partner at different places within the wood.⁶⁴ They are defined, to a large extent, by who they

⁶¹ For a study of the status of early modern dance and its popularity, discourses on dance and court and countryside dancing, see Margaret M. McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance: European Fashion, French Obsession* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁶² Dancing in the round especially in a pastoral setting relates to the maypole. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, ‘Peasants Dancing Around a Maypole’ presents a dynamic village scene with a large group of people forming a circle by holding hands around a large pole. See McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance*, p. 203.

⁶³ In the next scene Titania enters with her train to dance a ‘roundel’, a dance in a circle (II.2.1).

⁶⁴ Not just between Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius, but also with Oberon, Hippolyta, Theseus, Bottom and Titania. Theseus and Hippolyta open the play discussing their imminent marriage (I.1.19). Oberon and Titania make their first appearance disagreeing about marriage. Oberon

are with and the physical journey through the wood that makes or breaks those relations.

The movement of the dance or 'round' reflects or responds to the movement of language, the ways in which it develops, digresses and repeats.⁶⁵ Just as we follow the characters' speech on its winding journey so they speak in metaphors of movement, ones that refer explicitly to the circular dance. Puck says to Bottom 'I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round' (III.1.106). Puck will both follow and lead at once, suggesting that he will follow his physical path but lead him down an abstract path of comedy in nonsense that follows the never-ending path of the circle. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio also uses a figure of movement to symbolise the method of linguistic understanding: 'follow me this jest now till thou hast worn out thy pump, that when the single sole of it is worn, the jest may remain after the wearing sole singular' (II.4.60-4). The 'sole' of the 'pump' or shoe identifies the understanding of the 'jest' with the physical act of walking or wandering. Specifically Mercutio's jest or extended metaphor is so lengthy and, like Puck's, round and about that it will wear away the shoe with the amount of walking required to 'keep up'.

Dancing is also an important metaphor of harmony, happiness and concord with the surroundings. Titania describes how: 'Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead, | By paved fountain or by rushy brook, | Or in the beached margent of the sea, | To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind' (II.1.83-6). Dancing mingles the body and nature, hair with wind, as hair 'dances' to the music of the wind. A sense of

alludes to the various swapping and switching of partners from the beginning: 'How canst thou thus for shame, Titania, | Glance at my credit with Hippolyta, | Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?' (II.1.74-6).

⁶⁵ Metaphor has been interpreted in terms of movement, as bringing together distant things, making them more 'compact', yet also achieving far and wide-reaching meaning. As Jean Ricardou points out, metaphor is the shortest distance between two points. 'Like' or 'as' have been removed, shrinking the distance between the subjects conceptually as well as on the page. See Jean Ricardou, *Nouveau Problèmes du Roman* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 106.

harmony is developed in dancing by two elements joining without struggle.⁶⁶ Laurel Moffatt has argued that dancing is a symbol of concord in the play: ‘The idea of the dance is of great significance for both current and Renaissance audiences, although for different reasons. While current critics have for some decades shunned the “Tillyardized” idea of order and harmony, in favor of discussions of “the diverse and semiotically complex practices of dancing,” it was nonetheless an accepted notion in the sixteenth century that the act of dancing represented order and harmony.’⁶⁷ Yet dancing, as the method that achieves harmony, can be semiotically complex; harmony is the desired end or ideal but its route is not necessarily straightforward or achievable.

Titania’s speech is only a reminiscence of past congruity before Oberon caused upset: ‘with thy brawls thou hast disturb’d our sport’—other forces disperse harmony in much the way that Puck’s mistaken drops and the volubility of desire prevent harmony from flourishing with the four lovers. Moffatt claims that ‘dancing operated as an ordering principle, locating all its participants in their rightful ranks and places.’⁶⁸ Dancing orders through pattern and symmetry. In the combination of parts or details in accord with each other it produces an aesthetically pleasing effect.⁶⁹ But these positions are contingent; harmony is perhaps the ideal end but in

⁶⁶ Yet this is described in the past tense, before Oberon caused upset: ‘with thy brawls thou hast disturb’d our sport. | Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain, | As in revenge, have suck’d up from the sea | Contagious fogs’ (II.1.87-90). The wind that provided a melody now makes noises that are no use for dancing, only a sucking that threatens a diseasing fog. The sense of disharmony is much greater than harmony, and this is the setting for the play—not the dancing to the whistling of the wind but that of societal destruction, of disaster, famine and disorder. The ‘contagious fog which falling in the land | Have every pelting river made so proud | That they have overborne their continents: | The ox hath therefore stretch’d his yoke in vain, | The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn | Hath rotted ere his youth attain’d a beard; | The fold stands empty in the drowned field, | And crows are fatted with the murrion flock’ (II.1.90-7).

⁶⁷ Laurel Moffatt, ‘The Woods as Heterotopia in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, *Studia Neophilologica*, Vol. 76, Issue 2, (2004), 182-187, p. 183.

⁶⁸ Moffatt, ‘The Woods as Heterotopia’, p. 183.

⁶⁹ The harmony of music and dance relates to the pleasing combination or arrangement of sounds, as in poetry or in speaking; Titania’s speech is lyrical, ordered into iambic pentameter, and its meaning is coherent: ‘Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead, | By paved fountain or by rushy brook, | Or in the

practice in *MSND* it remains an aspiration. Symmetry and patterning are used between the lovers but without needing to be what Moffat calls ‘Tillyardized’, that is, emphasising unity in the play and more broadly its fit within the ‘World Order’.

The pattern of the dance may well be elegant but on closer inspection it is not symmetrical. The male characters exchange partners but the women do not change partners at all: Hermia is in love with Lysander from the beginning as Helena is in love with Demetrius, which remains unchanged. Discussion of the symmetry of exchange where equal property is swapped becomes gendered and unequal. The signification of the dance, then, is not a simplification of social relations, represented as easily symmetrical and pleasingly patterned. It may be connected to ideal social relations but it does not insist on idealising those relations into Tillyard’s ‘world order’, as demonstrated by Titania’s description of a fallen world.⁷⁰ It is, however, able to offer an understanding of other puzzling social relations in the play, such as desire or love. The heuristic of the dance accommodates the deferral of desire, that once one lover is pursued and won desire shifts onto another. The dance also allows for the word ‘love’ to gain a clearer meaning, as when Demetrius begins the play pursuing Hermia but then ends the play in love with Helena. Declarations of love are to be understood through the experimenting exchange of partners rather than reliable, eternal feelings.

beached margent of the sea, | To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind’. The three places provide three images of distinct meeting places where dancing took place. This is even more strongly emphasised at the end of the play when Oberon calls for a dance. Titania responds: First, rehearse your song by rote | To each word a warbling note: | Hand in hand, with fairy grace, | Will we sing, and bless this place.’ (V.1.396-400) Rehearsing by rote is a form of learning that uses repetition to convey information to the memory. Rote here ensures that the words of the song are attached to the correct note in an ordered way, a bond that is reflected in the joining of hands of the dance.

⁷⁰ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Penguin, 1990, first pub. 1943). Tillyard perceives the Elizabethan world as rigorously hierarchically structured in a ‘great chain of being’ which would lead to a divinely appointed destiny. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 23.

2.4.3.2 *Ceasing the Movement – the Wall*

Despite the claim that figurative language in *MSND* is perpetually digressive, boundaries representing proper usage are eventually visible in the form of the wall. In the early modern period, discussion of metaphor and figuration often returned to questions of propriety. Propriety, by definition, involves clearly defined boundaries, whilst figurative language violates these boundaries. For instance, Quintilian defined a ‘trope’ as ‘the artistic alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another’.⁷¹ The wall represents the attempt to restrain both literal and figurative wandering for the sake of propriety, which will allow the play to close.

In the Renaissance, metaphor was not considered an improper use of language: it had a function within the rules of rhetoric. Puttenham describes the figures of speech as an ornament of language, as something being added to decorate it, ‘disguising it no little from the ordinary and accustomed’.⁷² This description does not easily translate into the present, as Puttenham locates linguistic ornament as belonging to the life of the court, associated with class, ‘custom’ and ‘civility’.⁷³ Linguistic ‘ornamentation’ in Puttenham’s sense is not just an addition, but has its own rules and conventions and it would be dangerous to regard it as inessential and disposable. He states that ‘the chief praise and cunning of our poet is in the discreet using of his figures’, and that ‘nothing can be more unsavory and far from civility’ than not using figures.⁷⁴ His reference to ‘civility’ suggests there is a proper type of use for the figures—one that is correct and conventional, characterised by restraint. This is a restraint that Shakespeare seems to resist. Instead he uses figurative

⁷¹ ‘Tropus est verbi vel sermonis a propria significatione in aliam cum virtute mutatio’, Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1920), 8.6, pp. 301-1.

⁷² George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn, (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 221.

⁷³ Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, p. 221.

⁷⁴ Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, p. 223. Ted Cohen, ‘At Play in the Fields of Metaphor’, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

language and dramatic structure in a mode of metaphorical and literal wandering, which goes beyond this boundary of courtly decorum that Puttenham counsels.

The *MSND* wall acknowledges Renaissance propriety by providing a limit to linguistic and figurative wandering. Although discussion of the resolution of the play traditionally focuses on the restoration of ordered society through the marriage, the figurative world simultaneously is brought to a close with the performance of ‘Pyramus and Thisby’ diverting to play around a wall.⁷⁵ It is purposely foolish and overly dramatic, as Pyramus declares to the wall, ‘And thou, O Wall, O sweet, O lovely wall, | That stand’st between her father’s ground and mine!’ (V.1.174-5). The bizarre wall is Snout disguised in ‘The loam, this rough-cast, and this stone’ (V.1.161). It represents the same wall ‘[t]hrough which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby, | Did whisper often, very secretly.’ (V.1.159-60).⁷⁶ Losing patience, Hippolyta declares ‘This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard’ (V.1.210). Theseus reveals this silliness to be a serious part of imagination: ‘The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.’ (V.1.211-2). The wall at the end of the play represents the end of the wandering by positing a physical division, in much the same way that the three houses in *Comedy of Errors* momentarily arrest the wandering twins by physically barring their running hither and thither (III.1 and V.1). It is significant that the wall, as a representative boundary, is also a physical barrier—the movement away from metaphorical abstraction returns to the literal.

⁷⁵ Patricia Parker argues that walls and partitions are metaphors for the control of speech. See Parker, ‘The Bible and the Marketplace: *The Comedy of Errors*’, in *Shakespeare From the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 56-82. For a discussion of Shakespeare and dilation, see Patricia Parker, ‘Shakespeare and Rhetoric: “Dilation” and “Delation” in *Othello*’ in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, (London: Methuen, 1985), 54-74.

⁷⁶ James Calderwood discusses the wall in *MSND*, offering a bawdy reading of its ‘crannied hole, or chink’. James L. Calderwood, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 126-32.

The scene occurs in Theseus's palace, a place of walls and controlled space in comparison with the uncontrolled wandering of the wood. The wall, as a counterpart to the uncultivated wood, artificially divides up the space and imposes order, ending the madness. This, however, has been interpreted differently by critics. Jan Kott claims that the wall is indecently sexual: 'This scene's crudity is both naive and sordid...where obscene senses are given to innocent words. Gestures here are more lewd than words.'⁷⁷ Although the language may well have the potential for a bawdy interpretation, this approach fails to connect the wall as a structure that interrupts the constant movement of characters and their language. In *The Comedy of Errors* the three doors—Antipholus of Ephesus's house, the Courtesan's house and the Abbey—put a temporary halt on the physical wandering, the linguistic error and the mistaken identity. Similarly, *MSND* ends with the action placed within a physical edifice and the institution of the court. Puck says 'Not a mouse | Shall disturb this hallowed house' (V.1.387-8), referring to Theseus's palace, a clear and structured place opposed to the dark and winding environment of the wood.

The wall, however, is not straightforwardly a deferential acknowledgement of the boundary of propriety that ceases the literal and figurative wandering, and its comic playfulness. Although it seeks to impose a limit, it is a limit that is transgressed. At the beginning of the performance we are introduced to the new characters, and are asked to perceive them as other than they have been: 'This man is Pyramus...This beauteous lady Thisby is certain. | This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present | Wall' (V.1.129-32). Quince, as the Prologue, tells the audience 'At the which let no man wonder' (V.1.134). We are asked not to question the representations of characters, especially that of the wall. Theseus says of the only

⁷⁷ Jan Kott, 'The Bottom Translation', *William Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'*, ed. Harold Bloom, 73-85, p. 81.

other 'onstage' character, Snug as the Lion, 'I wonder if the lion be to speak', to which Demetrius responds 'No wonder, my lord; one lion may, when many asses do' (V.1.153-4). His remark implies the low status of the supposedly dim-witted actors, but also inadvertently refers to the magic that enables animals to speak, for Bottom to become a talking ass. Demetrius's comment hints that the playful transference of figuration to literality has not yet ended, and that we may well see a talking lion, which we do.

The wall is an active participant in the playfulness of the scene rather than a solid object that represents the end of the characters' physical wanderings and the linguistic movement between literal and figurative. The wall is personified, explaining his function: 'I, one [Snout] by name, present a wall' (V.1.156). In return, Demetrius sarcastically comments 'It is the wittiest partition that I ever heard discourse' (V.1.166). The wall is not simply an immobile structure but can move. Pyramus asks 'Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne! [Wall holds up his fingers]' (V.1.177). The fact that the wall can move, walk and speak follows the model of the impossible animation of Bottom, that an ass's head can speak. The shape Snout makes with his fingers represents the 'chink' through which the lovers comically communicate, not a literal boundary but one that participates in the action to enable humour. Pyramus mistakes his senses claiming that through the chink 'I see a voice!...I can hear my Thisby's face' (V.1.192-3). Demetrius, despairing at such a far-fetched scene as a talking wall, says 'No remedy, my lord, when walls are so willful to hear without warning' (V.1.209). He is alluding to the proverb 'walls have ears', which Snout certainly does. Just as Bottom's foolish character is literally represented, so the symbolic wall is literally personified. The wall does not succeed in preventing playful oscillation between the concrete and playful representation.

The wall is only a temporary fixture and does not remain to the end of the play. He exits (V.1.206), releasing any restraint the wall might have on playful figuration and allowing metaphor and improbability to continue even more strongly with the ‘man i’ th’ moon’. Moonshine holds up a lantern and explains ‘this lanthorn doth the horned moon present; Myself the man i’ th’ moon do seem to be’ (V.1.244-5). At this point, the court, as the advocate of decorum, most strongly objects to this representation. They had mocked the ill-speaking of the actors and ‘silliness’ of the wall, but here Theseus fully disapproves of the impropriety of the ‘man in the moon’; it is simply too far-fetched. He says, ‘This is the greatest error of all the rest. The man should be put into the lanthorn. How is it else the man i’ th’ moon?’ (V.1.247). He objects to the metalepsis of the image that has too many substitutions: the lantern is to represent the moon and Moonshine is supposed to be somehow inside it.⁷⁸

Theseus denies the representation that Moonshine encourages us to believe in because it is the ‘greatest error’: the biggest leap in figuration. As a representation of early modern decorum at work, Theseus associates figuration with error, selecting excessive figuration as the worst error of all. This is one of the most explicit references in Shakespearean drama to figurative language as error. At the end of the play it is not so much the wall but the onstage audience who seek to restrain the excessive figuration to moderation and decorum.

2.4.4 Separate Worlds

2.4.4.1 *Parted Word: Parted World*

The first two sections of this chapter have explored what, in the introduction, I referred to as the first component of the methodology of metaphor, repetition of the

⁷⁸ ‘Metalepsis’ is defined as ‘any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions’, as discussed below. See *OED* at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 18 November 2014].

digressive structure of metaphor, in which meaning wanders from literal sense. In this section I explore the second component, which emphasises metaphor's dual inputs. Primary and secondary subjects are combined in metaphor, and this structure is mirrored in the various double worlds that we find in the play.

As the play is drawing near its close, Hermia comments on this, musing 'Methinks I see these things with parted eye, | When every thing seems double' (IV.1.188-9). This could well be the epigraph of *MSND* with its movement into doubleness, exemplified by the double meaning of metaphor, used so pervasively in the play. The association of 'double' vision as being fuzzily focused can be compared to the indistinct boundary between tenor and vehicle, an association intensified by Hermia's uncertain judgment that what she sees only 'seems' doubled. Yet critical interpretation has typically played down the strength of metaphor at this moment, taking Hermia's words literally as referring to her sight. 'Parted' appears to be the tricky word given that the major editions choose to gloss it. The Cambridge edition explains it as 'divided, i.e. with the eyes out of focus'.⁷⁹ The Oxford edition offers 'divided, with the eyes out of focus'.⁸⁰ The *Riverside Shakespeare* gives 'out of focus',⁸¹ and the *Norton Shakespeare* selects 'improperly focused'.⁸² These four major texts approach this crux through the medium of sight, taking Helena's reference to her 'eye' literally. Yet 'parted' is also the moment meaning departs from the literal to the metaphorical and critical interpretation underestimates the alternative meanings that operate in this sentence.

⁷⁹ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. R. A. Foakes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 112.

⁸⁰ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Peter Holland, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 224.

⁸¹ Shakespeare, *Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 275.

⁸² Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, (London: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 849.

Having a ‘parted’ eye could mean seeing two things at once, supported by Hermia’s own kind of gloss ‘where everything seems double’. But doubled in what way? It could mean with both eyes out of focus, as present-day editions suggest, or with the eyes looking in two directions, where the vision that continually relies on both eyes working together to provide a coherent image fragments. The coherence of the singular has been sundered into two potentially conflicting subjects, reflecting the structure of metaphor as a way of seeing the world on two separate planes.⁸³

Alternatively, if we return to a literal interpretation, parting may not refer to some kind of separated vision but more simply to the opening and closing of the eye.

Hermia’s eye being ‘parted’ announces that she is seeing things clearly for the first time—in all its doubleness, the opposite of previous interpretation that reads her comment as a declaration of fuzziness and confusion.

2.4.4.2 *Dreams*

If the double, metaphorical world is the world of the play, then for the first time Hermia sees it correctly, without reducing it to a single vision or subject. This moment of perspicuity can be developed by investigating one of the major themes of the play: dreaming, an idea closely explored by Marjorie Garber.⁸⁴ Garber argues

⁸³ ‘Parted’ also seems to hold a significance that extends to the wider world given the context of Hermia’s words alongside thoughts of the world beyond the self: ‘These things seems small and undistinguishable, like far-off mountains turned into clouds.’ (IV.1.187-8). This nuances ‘parted’ to change perspective, where two levels of perception obtain and Hermia sees herself within a larger frame, no longer lost in the wood.

⁸⁴ Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: from Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press), 1974. Garber, however, does not emphasise this essential characteristic of the Shakespearean dream, of the doubled, ambiguous, parted word and world. On dream in Shakespeare see also: Jerome Mandel, ‘Dream and Imagination in Shakespeare’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24 (1973), 61-68; John Arthos, *Shakespeare’s Use of Dream and Vision* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1977); Jan Lawson Hinely, ‘Expounding the Dream: Shaping Fantasies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’ in *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Literature and Film*, eds. Maurice Charney and Joseph Reppen, (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 120-38; Peter Holland, ‘Introduction’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thelma N. Greenfield, ‘Our Nightly Madness: Shakespeare’s Dream without *The Interpretation of Dreams*’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler

that the play ‘reverses the categories of reality and illusion, sleeping and waking, art and nature, to touch upon the central theme of dream which is truer than reality.’⁸⁵

Hermia’s comment gestures towards this awareness, that the world of dream and imagination is not false or trivial but a revelation of another reality.⁸⁶ To be ‘parted’ from the safe reality of wakefulness is the condition of dreaming. Being ‘parted’ alludes to those two states, experienced by Bottom, Titania, Lysander and Hermia. Demetrius responds to Hermia’s ambiguous reference to the ‘parted’ world saying: ‘Are you sure | That we are awake? It seems to me | That yet we sleep, we dream.’ (IV.1.192-4). His question demonstrates his interpretation of her meaning, that she was indeed alluding to the parted states of sleeping and dreaming, or it at least connects ‘parted’ with ‘dreaming’ by implication.

The dreamworld is also the metaphorical world, an imitation of a world but counter-intuitively the one that is most sensible throughout the play. This is further support for the claim that metaphor has a special significance in *MSND*. As Garber argues, the play elevates the irrational above the rational, supporting and promoting the secondary, symbolic world.⁸⁷ Dreams involve a blended reality. In dreams, real characters and objects, or rather representations of these, combine with unreal elements to create a world wholly constructed in the realm of consciousness. Indeed, Hippolyta declares as much at the beginning of *MSND*, establishing dreaming as the mode of existence in the play and stating the play’s trajectory as a dream that ends in marriage: ‘Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; | Four nights will quickly dream away the time; | And then the moon, like to a silver bow | New-bent in

(London: Garland, 1998), 331-44; Jennifer Lewin, “‘Your actions are my dreams’: Sleepy Minds in Shakespeare’s Last Plays’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 31 (2003), 184-204.

⁸⁵ Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare*, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Frye highlights the similarity between the green world and dreaming: ‘the green world has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires.’ Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 183. Frye’s green world encodes a movement between two worlds, as does the state of dreaming between sleep and waking.

⁸⁷ Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare*, p. 60.

heaven, shall behold the night | Of our solemnities' (I.1.7-10). Dreaming night will envelop the bright reality of day, before the 'solemnities' of the marriages of Hippolyta and Theseus, but also Helena, Lysander, Hermia and Demetrius. As the blending theory of metaphor suggests (see above), metaphor involves the transference of subjects by blending them together, which is what happens in the dreamworld of the wood. Garber notes that metaphor 'is a condition structurally analogous to the dream state. Moreover, in *MSND*, the spectator's eye is continually directed to the act of metaphor-making, the visible exchange of literal for figurative and fictive.'⁸⁸ In the play, metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, but a fundamental organising schema, as demonstrated by the structural comparison between metaphor and dream.⁸⁹ This is rendered explicit by 'Bottom's dream', where he wakes up with an ass's head. Metaphor is literalised, where the state of dreaming has enabled one thing to stand for another in the process of metaphor, for Bottom's ass's head to represent his asinine nature.

It is necessary to prevent the permanent sealing off of the two parts of metaphor, of tenor and vehicle, of literal and figurative, in order to understand Shakespeare's dramatic language. *MSND* constantly collapses and blends tenor and vehicle through the contiguity of surface and figurative meaning, two elements that are constantly on the verge of becoming one rather than two, contained within the uncertain world of the dream. Metaphor is a collapse of the double: the twins in *The Comedy of Errors* recreate this collapse through the inability of the printed text to maintain the distinction (see chapter three). The interchangeability of characters – Helena and Hermia or Demetrius and Lysander – is also structurally equivalent to

⁸⁸ Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare*, p. 77

⁸⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson propose that metaphor in everyday language becomes an organising structure of our thought. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd edn. (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

metaphor. Through their extreme similarity the identity of one interacts or becomes confused with the identity of another, as do the primary and secondary subjects of metaphor. This is what I have called the ‘methodology of metaphor’, which not only foregrounds the salience of metaphor but uses its structure hermeneutically. This is in order to create an imaginative, magical world that is rendered uncertain by its duality.

The blend of inputs leaves the audience and characters puzzled over what is reality and what is dream. ‘What visions I have seen! Methought I was enamor’d of an ass’, declares Titania, describing her mistaken love for Bottom as dreaming ‘visions’ (IV.176-7). Likewise, Demetrius says on behalf of the four loves that ‘yet we sleep, we dream’ (IV.1.194). Both these subjective positions suggest that there is some kind of reality from which the dreams depart. Yet the titular *Dream* encourages interpretation of the entire play as a dream, rendering any reality only part of the dream and therefore blending the two worlds of dream and reality together. This is reinforced by Puck’s closing speech, where he asks the audience to think that they have been asleep: ‘That you have but slumber’d here | While these visions did appear. | And this weak and idle theme, | No more yielding but a dream’ (V.1.425-8). The structure of metaphor enables the collapsing and blending of dreaming and wakefulness to create an uncertain, playful world of wandering, where magic opens up what is possible, enabling the creative powers of the imagination to expand.

2.4.5 Metaphor and Error

Previous sections have established metaphor as a crucial linguistic feature as well as a hermeneutic tool in *MSND*. The importance of place and movement in understanding the wandering nature of metaphor has been emphasised. It has been

suggested that metaphor, as a wandering away from sense and literal speech, is language in error. We can perceive an intensification of wandering and mistake in the character of Bottom. He employs a similar style of figuration to other characters yet the interpretation of his error diverges: he is in error whereas Puck is poetically errant. An understanding of metaphor as error lays the groundwork for a revisionist reading of Bottom. Bottom's errors cannot be dismissed as crude mistakes, for this is out of keeping with the broader role of metaphor in the play as a poetic wandering of sense.

2.4.5.1 *Bottom's Error*

Typically Bottom is seen as one of Shakespeare's most erroneous characters and his abundant linguistic style is marked with error. He recites a speech with short lines and a rhyme scheme almost comic in its obviousness: rhyming 'rocks', 'shocks' and 'locks' of which he declares 'This was lofty!' (I.2.31-8).⁹⁰ Ironically he imperfectly pronounces perfect as 'perfit' and repeats some phrases without need: "Let him roar again; let him roar again." (I.2.72-3). His use of words is frequently misinterpreted by those around him. He tells Quince 'You were best to call [the men] generally, man by man, according to the scrip.' (I.2.2-3). 'Generally' is interpreted as 'severally' or 'individually' by R. A. Foakes.⁹¹ In *The Riverside Shakespeare* this is selected as an example of Bottom's many errors: 'The first of Bottom's characteristic verbal blunders. Here he obviously means "individually"—just the opposite of what he says.'⁹² 'Generally' could, however, just as easily refer to the act of addressing the men who are defined as a group. Bottom could mean 'call them together, gather them and do so by calling their individual names'. Although 'man by man' suggests

⁹⁰ See Michael Saenger, 'The Limits of Translation', *Shakespeare Survey*, vol.65, (2012), 69-76.

⁹¹ Foakes, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 57.

⁹² Evans, ed., *Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 259.

calling out the man and his part, ‘generally’ also means to include every individual or particular. Shakespeare uses this meaning to refer to a group by remembering the individuals that make it up in *The Taming of the Shrew*: ‘You must as we do, gratify this gentleman, to whom we all rest generally beholding.’ (I.2.274). This suggests that perceiving his language as wrong requires more careful thought, which might yield a more mixed understanding of Bottom’s language, one more able to accommodate linguistic variance instead of necessarily seeing it as a series of ‘verbal blunders’.

At this moment of linguistic ‘mistake’, meaning is unloosed and created by those who listen and not by the speaker himself. Semantically, Bottom’s language wanders and this is perceived to be part of his error. In the act of interpretation the ambiguity of Bottom’s language is treated as error, turning it from a linguistic puzzle into a deficiency. The interpretations of the glosses in *The Riverside Shakespeare* further force apart standard language from other usage. This strengthens the ability of standard language to define linguistic difference as wrong. Given that early modern English lacked standardisation, the appropriateness of this can be questioned (see chapter two). Just as ‘scrip’ means script, the difference of this spelling encodes Bottom’s accent or non-standard language. Designating it as a malapropism makes it ‘wrong’, adhering to the evaluative norm of labelling any difference of speech from an ideal standard as incorrect. This can be perceived as a class issue, still perpetuated by those who are willing to view Bottom’s language as comic in its wrongness or resisted by those who have begun to feel uncomfortable with the implications of this humour.⁹³

⁹³ Sylvia Adamson points out that the use or misuse of certain words ‘is not simply a linguistic fact but a social problem’. Adamson, ‘Literary Language’, *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed. Roger Lass, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Vol. 3, 539-95, p. 575. See also Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

However, rather than being riddled with error, Bottom's language often displays properties of *copia*. This is a style of speech that is varied and amplified, that expands upon a subject in an eloquent way (see the introduction, 0.2.2).

Bottom's speech is frequently without destination, just as *copia* does not end with a purpose of arrival; its method is delay, to extend the journey. Its purpose is to take the meaning of a word and embellish it, to give a meaning no end, that is until the rush of the dialogue moves on to the next subject. This happens frequently between the parts of dialogue in which Bottom wants to stay and ponder—characteristic of *copia*—and those parts that move the entire play on in its action.

For example, Bottom says of his part: 'I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.' (I.2.93-6). In this digression Bottom lists in detail four different colours of beard without commenting what difference any of the colours make to his performance and without making a decision which he will wear. Quince gives an off-hand response before moving on to the much more important task of giving out the parts, arranging the time and date of the rehearsal and asking the group of men to learn their parts: 'here are your parts, and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you, to con them by tomorrow night; and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight' (I.2.99-102).

Quince's speech is copious too in its variation of his request that the men learn their lines, yet it is stylistically different from Bottom's. Quince's variation expresses the strength of his desire that the actors 'con' their parts; in that sense it is meaningful as it emphasises something important. His speech moves the action of the play along—its purpose is clear, whereas the purpose of Bottom's speech is less explicit and his digression is longer. Bottom adopts ways of speaking that are associated with

methods of eloquence. This is not to argue that this makes his language eloquent, yet an analysis of his copious style and use of metalepsis reveals that his language is structurally and stylistically closer to, say Puck's, than an interpretation of his language as mistaken or incorrect might suggest.

Bottom and the mechanicals are both linguistically and dramatically playful in the wood. This leads to *copia*. For example, in the rehearsal and staging of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, there are more lines in the rehearsal of the play than the performance, suggesting that the journey is of equal or greater importance than the arrival. The rehearsal takes up the whole of Act I Scene 2 and III.1.1-76 totalling 186 lines, whereas there are 146 lines in the performance of the play in V.1 from those who adopt a character. The rehearsal as well as the performance is linguistic play with a specific placing – play in the wood is language on holiday, more inclined to nonconformity because of the setting. 'Play in the wood' is spending time in a meaningful place without distinct purpose.

The identification of Bottom as a blunderer depends on the reader or audience taking an approach to interpreting his words which obscures the potential ambiguity of his meaning. This is a political decision, as a reader may be more inclined to probe the semantic possibilities of higher status characters.⁹⁴ Michael Saenger seems to adopt this approach, arguing: '[w]e laugh at these characters because their words make audible their awkward efforts to translate their own social status: they are walking malapropisms'.⁹⁵ We are licensed to laugh at these characters' funny ways of speaking without considering their dual role as signifiers of class. It is Theseus, the Duke of Athens, who allows everyone to laugh at the mistakes of the mechanicals: 'Our sport shall be to take what they mistake' (V.1.90). He can do so as

⁹⁴ 'Working class' speech is placed in opposition with more standardised speech—those in control of rhythm and meaning, who use verse without Bottom's hesitations.

⁹⁵ Saenger, 'The Limits of Translation', p. 74.

one who uses standard language and knows the rules. Saenger is only following Theseus in condoning laughter at linguistic difference.⁹⁶ Yet not all of Bottom's language fits neatly into the (anachronistic) category of malapropism,⁹⁷ and perhaps his language can be more closely associated with Puck's ceaseless linking of images and metaphor.

A way to consider both types of linguistic use is through the rhetorical figure metalepsis. Metalepsis is a type of metaphor that has a series or succession of figurative substitutions.⁹⁸ The *OED* defines it as, '[t]he rhetorical figure consisting in the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is itself a metonym; (more generally) any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions.'⁹⁹ Erasmus provides the example, 'the Greeks call something "sharp-pointed" when they mean "swift"'.¹⁰⁰ The missing stage is the establishment of the connection between something sharp and something swift, like an arrow. Brian Cummings describes metalepsis as 'a process of transition, doubling, or ellipsis in figuration, of replacing a figure with another figure, and of missing out of the figure in between in order to create a figure that stretches the sense or which fetches things from far off.'¹⁰¹ This idea of wild semantic difference via metaphorical combination applies to parts of Bottom's speech. Bottom's final sentence closes Act I Scene 2:

⁹⁶ It is one class ridiculing another. This form of class mockery is also discussed by Margaret Schlauch, 'The Social Background of Shakespeare's Malapropisms', *A Reader in the Language of Shakespearean Drama*, eds. Vivian Salmon and Edwina Burness, (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987), 71-99; and Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, p. 83-115.

⁹⁷ 'Malapropism' comes from Richard Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop, a character in *The Rivals* (1775).

⁹⁸ This is George Puttenham's definition: 'But the sense is much altered and the hearers conceit strangely entangled by the figure *Metalepsis*, which I call the farfet, as when we had rather fetch a word a great way off then to use one nerer to expresse the matter aswel and plainer.' George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 183.

⁹⁹ *OED* at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 18 November 2014].

¹⁰⁰ Erasmus, *Copia*, Thompson, p. 339.

¹⁰¹ Cummings, 'Metalepsis', p. 219. Alastair Fowler terms the use of multiple or conflicting 'doubled, embedded and inverted metaphor' the 'Shakespearean conceit'. See Alastair Fowler, *Conceitful Thought: The Interpretation of English Renaissance Poems* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), 87-113, p. 90.

‘Enough; hold, or cut bow-strings.’ (88). At first the hearer’s understanding is momentarily bewildered. There are no other references to archery in the scene and the metaphor of cutting ‘bow-strings’ seems obscure—which is how it has been interpreted.¹⁰² Bottom’s phrase is an example of metalepsis: it draws together distinct concepts without demonstrating their clear relation. Yet ‘hold’ refers to keeping the agreement of meeting at a certain time and place for the rehearsal while cut the strings evokes the release of the ‘tension’ of the agreement when the entire enterprise of putting on a play would fall apart. This could be interpreted as a pithy metaphor that prominently closes the scene, or it could be an example of Bottom’s deviant language, which is unclear. Here, ‘wrong’ verges on the poetic.

Metalepsis is often associated with catachresis: the improper use of words.¹⁰³ It can be seen as either a complex elaboration of speech or a waste of words. Failure and success are very close together here. In the process of substitution, metalepsis deliberately leaves the process of transference implicit, as Bottom does: it is not initially clear what the relation is between ‘hold’ and the cutting of ‘bow strings’. Can we see Bottom’s words as poetic or do they fail in achieving any signification other than their own ridiculousness? Bottom’s phrase falls into the ambiguous middle ground. Puck has a ‘godlike power of speech’ whereas Bottom’s is distinctly ‘mortal’, yet they both seem to use language in metaleptic ways.

Bottom is a character who embodies wandering in several ways: through his getting lost in the wood, the unloosed and ambiguous meaning of his discourse, and literally with his ass’s head imitating the movement of metaphor, one of substitution

¹⁰² Evans and Tobin, eds., *Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 260.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of the difference between metaphor and catachresis that stems from the classical tradition, see Patricia Parker, ‘Metaphor and Catachresis’ in *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 60-76.

and translation.¹⁰⁴ The association between the figurative and physical *divertissement* in the wood, discussed above, is one that Bottom recognises. He says: ‘if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn’ (III.1.149-51). If a turn is a trope as well as a physical change in direction, Bottom is drawing a direct relation between figurative language and being physically lost in the wood. Despite being lost and linguistically ‘confused’, by recognising this relation between figurative and literal wandering, he reveals an insight that the other characters fail to recognise and express.

What is crucial to a revisionist reading of Bottom is the perception of his particular kind of wandering, whether it is poetic or in error. Seeing Bottom as serious or silly affects how his language is edited which in turn constructs him as either silly or serious. The following is a moment that actively constructs Bottom as a mistaken character:

Bottom (as Pyramus)	Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet,--	
Quince	Odours--‘odourous’!	
Bottom (as Pyramus)	...odours savours sweet.	(3.I.65-7)

Because Quince and Bottom’s meaning is not entirely clear here, the perception of difficulty, of failed or faulty metaphor, has led editors to attribute semantic uncertainty to textual error. Instead of following the copy-text, Peter Holland turns to the Folio, generally deemed to be less reliable than Q1 as it was printed from Q2. In the Folio, Quince simply repeats ‘Odours, odours’, as if correcting Bottom’s first and mistaken ‘odious’ which he then gets right at l.67. Whereas in Q1 (above), Bottom mistakes his first line which Quince picks up, demonstrating how the correct adjective is formed: ‘Odours, odorous’, which Bottom gets wrong again. Foakes follows the Q1 copy text because emendation either way still does not render this

¹⁰⁴ Metaphor is also known by its Latin name *translatio*.

passage entirely clear, whereas Holland bases his decision ‘as much on which jokes are wanted as on textual analysis’.¹⁰⁵ Foakes works on the assumption that Bottom’s language will be wrong, that ‘Bottom’s erratic grammar and sense’ create a textual crux here.¹⁰⁶

The perception of Bottom’s language as faulty has led editors to judge that here his language in the text is incorrect or ‘corrupt’. The history of the text demonstrates the amount of change: Brooks changes Quince’s response to ‘Odorous! Odorous!’, while Wilson opts for ‘Odious?—odorous!’ This is further complicated by the meaning of Bottom’s repetition: ‘...odours savours sweet’, where it is not entirely clear whether ‘savours’ is a noun or verb’, and has led editors again to change it to ‘Odorous savours’.¹⁰⁷ Textual criticism has assumed that, because of Bottom’s typically mistaken language, there is a problem here that requires editorial intervention, which confuses semantic with textual error. The puzzle and difficulty of Bottom’s language cannot be left alone. Editors have tried to ameliorate Bottom’s error, making it more easily understood, refusing to let the meaning wander away; error is only understood as mistake, but Bottom’s language hints that this is not always the case. Metalepsis magnifies the error of metaphor as it demonstrates the potential overlap between poetic and mistaken language. Bottom’s particularly erratic use of metalepsis problematises the perception of error as requiring correction, where errors seem to move in a different direction towards meaning.¹⁰⁸

This relation between poetry and error is discussed in Renaissance literary theory. Richard Sherry deems that faults in language are particular to poetry, perhaps even one of its characteristics. He claims of a ‘Faute’ in language ‘which though it be

¹⁰⁵ Foakes, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁶ Foakes, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁷ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Cf chapter three where textual errors become meaningful to the thematic context of the play.

pardoned in Poetes, yet in prose it is not to be suffered. The kyndes bee these: obscure, inordinate, barbarous.¹⁰⁹ He then lists some unwanted (but markedly poetic) aspects of language, such as ‘super abundancia’, ‘ambiguitas’ and ‘cumulatio’, aspects which Erasmus promotes in his theory of *copia*. Unlike prose, poetry receives special dispensation from Sherry to be in error, suggesting that poetry is defined by linguistic error.

Despite the connection between error and poetry, Bottom’s speech is not perceived to be poetic. He repeatedly uses metalepsis, yet Puck has been most closely associated with it. For Harold Bloom, Puck *is* metalepsis. He claims that, ‘as a kind of flying metalepsis or trope of transumption, Puck is indeed what the rhetorician Puttenham called a far-fetcher.’¹¹⁰ He is a translator of love, switching characters’ affections to the most unlikely or ‘far-fetched’, subjects. Most notably he makes the Queen of the fairies fall in love with a mortal man who has an ass’s head. He is the agent of metamorphosis, where he not only transforms the referent through metaphor, but literally transforms Bottom’s head to that of an ass, enabled by his magic potions. Bloom’s naming him ‘metalepsis’ is suggestive of the unlikelihood of those transformations.

Puck uses metaphors liberally, and his magical nature invites suspicion that his metaphors may not remain purely abstract but instead become literally transformative. Puck is the ultimate wanderer, as he is termed in the play, and he exercises the ability to shrink large distances in the way he magically moves about the wood, just as metaphor does conceptually. Bottom is a lost wanderer, coming much closer to the other side of error as the mistaken. Yet Shakespeare resists the

¹⁰⁹ Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*, (London, 1550), Sig.Ci.v at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 13 November 2014].

¹¹⁰ Harold Bloom, ‘Introduction’, *William Shakespeare’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’*, *Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 1-7, p. 5.

opposition between Puck as the ‘correct’ wanderer and Bottom as the ‘incorrect’.

Puck uses metaphor successfully and poetically whereas Bottom’s has been interpreted as incorrect because of the class associations that prevent the lower status characters from speaking ‘correctly’. It is not deemed ‘poetic’, when in fact the language works in much the same way as Puck’s, combining metaphors and drawing disparate concepts together. If we approach Bottom’s errors as wanderings we can see how they exemplify the kind of wandering movement that is expressive of the figurative language of *MSND*. Applying that approach to putatively mistaken characters, such as Bottom and his ‘Mechanicals’, displays just how close the proximity of poetic and mistaken language really is, and how closely related error is to figurative language or poetry.

A frequent presupposition is that ‘metaphors are somehow “deviant,” that they need to be explained in terms of “normal” or “literal” uses of language’.¹¹¹ This propensity to understand metaphor by reference to literal meaning has led to error being situated at the heart of figurative language. Donald Davidson bases his theory of metaphor on the idea that a figurative reading is false or misleading: ‘[p]atent falsity is the usual case with metaphor’.¹¹² Searle agrees: ‘the defects which cue the hearer may be obvious falsehood, semantic nonsense, violations of conversational principles of communications.’¹¹³ When a literal interpretation of a word or phrase fails or is in error, a figurative interpretation needs to be searched for.¹¹⁴ The

¹¹¹ For example, see Ortony, ‘Metaphor, Language and Thought’, p. 4. This view is resisted by Max Black: ‘Somebody seriously making a metaphorical statement – say, “The Lord is my shepherd” – might reasonably claim that he meant just what he said, having chosen the words most apt to express his thought, attitudes, and feelings, and was by no means guilty of uttering a crass absurdity. Such a position cannot be rejected out of hand.’ Black, ‘More About Metaphor’, p. 22.

¹¹² Donald Davidson, ‘What Metaphors Mean’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Autumn, 1978), 31–47, p. 42.

¹¹³ Searle, ‘Metaphor’, p. 103.

¹¹⁴ This is called the ‘error recovery model’. For more see Raymond Gibbs, ‘Making Sense of Tropes’ *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252–76, p. 260.

audience is encouraged to identify linguistic ‘error’ in order to diagnose a case of metaphor and find another way of understanding that is outside ‘proper’ rules of use. This correlates error and metaphor twice over: mistake is metaphor and metaphor is a wandering of sense, a deviation from straightness and coherence.

2.4.6. Conclusion

Terence Cave emphasises the centrality of metaphor within writing: ‘Metaphor, metonymy, catachresis, and other tropes, refusing to be tied down to a purely accessory function, govern the development of apparently conceptual arguments’.¹¹⁵ Cave’s claim that metaphor is an organising rather than derivative principle coheres with my claim that the methodology of metaphor is demonstrated in *MSND*. The transformations in the play are both physical and abstract, from Bottom’s ass’s head to the strong and persistent metaphorical language. It is littered with failed or incomplete acts of translation or errors: Puck’s translation of Lysander into Helena-lover is central to the plot, and so is Bottom’s transformation. I have explored how metaphor works in *MSND* and argued that because of its structure with its movement of transformation, metaphor works as an interpretative methodology for understanding more than just language in the play; specifically, the symbolic structure of substitution and interaction extends to the setting of the wood which constantly resists interpretation as a literal space. The wood, as a place of wandering, gives errant language agency. Metaphor is aligned with wandering, as a mode of thought that is loosed from straightforward speech. Plain speech is associated with a straight path of direct expression and figurative language with a winding path that has the potential to lead to mistake.

¹¹⁵ Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*, p. xvii.

The most straightforwardly erroneous character in the play is Bottom. It is common to view him as a blunderer whose speech is riddled with linguistic errors. But the alternative understanding of error as wandering rather than incorrectness lends itself to a revisionist reading of Bottom. Bottom's use of metalepsis embodies both types of error: his language is confused, seeming to require correction, but is expressed in figures that motivate the audience to delve deeper into their potential meaning, similarly to Puck's. The re-reading of Bottom that I presented is made possible by an understanding of the link between error and metaphor. Bottom's errors are not merely examples of faulty or bungled speech, but also include his creative use of metalepsis, and it is possible to argue that, at least for Bottom, error is the motivation for poetry.

Category Error

3.5. Shakespeare's Faulty Genres: Error and Genre

Part of the task of understanding Shakespearean error is to ask if it differs across genres: is error in tragedy any different from error in comedy? If so, how? The first part of this chapter seeks to answer these questions with reference to *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, arguing that the early modern expectations of genre change the character and consequence of error. This approach to error, however, is complicated by Shakespeare's 'faulty' sense of genre, which frequently mixes genre conventions, transgressing the rules of early modern decorum that established genre expectations. If genre determines the characteristics of an error, what happens to error in a play that is not faithful to one genre? In order to understand this 'faulty genre' better, a play of mixed genre is examined: *Cymbeline*.

In the first section of part one (3.5.1.1) I argue that the interpretation of error depends on the genre in which it occurs, and that Shakespeare's 'faulty' genre exploits the interpretative differences between comedy and tragedy. In the second section of part one (3.5.1.2) I analyse *Cymbeline* on two levels. I proceed first to a textual analysis of *Cymbeline* on a local level, arguing that the interactions between Cloten and Imogen contain both comic and tragic elements, making the play's genre resistant to categorisation. The second part of the chapter (3.5.2) examines the problem of generic error from the perspective of the entire play, arguing that the ending turns the play from romance to its opposite, satire. This is chiefly because of the inconsistency between the middle and the ending: although *Cymbeline* concedes earlier that the Romans are unwelcome, he later embraces their political takeover of the country. The solution I offer to the problem of such inconsistency is that the

ending moves into a different genre. The play has previously been read as a political allegory of King James VI and I's project of Britain, and I develop this critical frame by arguing that the ending of the play makes this project an object of satire.

Our generic awareness of the proper trajectory of an early modern romance, which typically involves a redemptive plot and straightforwardly happy ending, makes satire possible because when our expectations of what should happen are confounded we look for other ways to explain the peculiar, unexpected ending.

3.5.1 Faulty Genre

3.5.1.1 *Error in Comedy and Tragedy*

Perhaps the central difference between the occurrence of error in comedy and in tragedy is that in comedy it is *casual* and in tragedy it is *causal*. In comedy, the inevitable return to normality tempers the threats of death and loss to which characters are subjected during the play. Egeon, who is condemned to death at the beginning of *The Comedy of Errors*, is saved from that fate. In *MSND*, Egeus orders that Hermia marry Demetrius against her wishes or face death and Puck saves her from death by magically inducing him to love her. The opening of *Twelfth Night* is only slightly different, with the threat to life stemming from natural events: Viola and Sebastian are shipwrecked and she believes he is dead. Of course, Sebastian has been rescued and at the end of the play is reunited with Viola. Comedy averts these deathly beginnings, which would likely be realised by tragedy; Egeon and Hermia would have been killed and Sebastian drowned. Aristotle defines comedy through error: 'the laughable is a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly and distorted without pain.'¹

¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 2.4, p. 6.

Pain and destruction are withheld in comedy: it is a mask, an imitation of the world without pain that enables the audience to laugh at mistakes and ugliness.

Comedy can sustain error without developing it into full tragic action. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse says ‘What error drives our eyes and ears amiss? | Until I know this sure uncertainty, | I’ll entertain the free’d fallacy’ (II.2.184-6).² He conceptualises error as something to ‘entertain’ for our enjoyment.³ His entertainment of error is both a suspension of the imperative to correct but also hints at the potential comedy that could follow. The ‘free’d’ sense is reminiscent of the liberated deviance of error as wandering that has been previously explored (see chapter 3). Comedy frees fallacy, exempting it from the mode of causality which in tragedy leads to death. This is a generic announcement from Antipholus: he is telling the audience how to understand and respond to the error, not with tragic consequence but as something that is not inconsistent with the comic world of the play. The basic association of comedy with happiness prevents the escalation of error into tragedy: in the absence of a tragic force error is more benign.

What is insignificant in comedy stubbornly remains important in tragedy. The import of error expands, becoming causally destructive. This is exemplified by the inconsistency between the size of an object and its power. Desdemona’s handkerchief, for example, is small and ordinary but gathers the power eventually to destroy lives. It begins as a mere ‘token’, the significance of which Othello expands to become a ‘pledge of love’, and then into a mistaken representation of his betrayal. Othello endows it with a strange, mystical power, stating that ‘there’s magic in the

² *The Riverside Shakespeare* follows Capell in changing ‘free’d’, as appears in the Folio, to ‘offer’d’. Although this restores the line to pentameter, we lose the alliteration and the sense of liberated error which accords with the recurring sense of wandering error.

³ There are other possible early modern meanings which could apply to Antipholus’s use of ‘entertain’, such as ‘to keep up, maintain’; ‘to keep, retain (a person) in one’s service’; or ‘to admit for consideration’. See *OED* entry on ‘entertain’ at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 20 November 2014].

web of it' as it was sewn by a 'sibyl' (III.4.71-2). He claims that 'To lose't or give't away were such perdition | As nothing else could match' (III.4.67-8). His reaction is overblown; the idea of eternal damnation for its loss is disproportionate.⁴ The 'proof' of the handkerchief in Cassio's possession leads Othello to cry murder: 'O, blood, blood, blood!' (III.3.451). We can sense the tragic hyperbole that fetishizes an object chosen for its insignificance, which expands rather than neutralises error.

The handkerchief demonstrates how, in tragedy, an object can have a significant causal impact, as this apparently trivial item is adduced as 'proof' of Desdemona's affair by Iago, with dire consequences.⁵ This differs from comedy in which the importance of an object is limited and is more casual in its consequence. The equivalent of the tragic handkerchief is the comic chain in *The Comedy of Errors*. Antipholus of Ephesus requests Angelo to make him a gold chain. Angelo releases it to the wrong Dromio leaving Antipholus of Ephesus to pursue Angelo for the chain he is yet to receive. The object fails to gain the significance of Desdemona's handkerchief. It is prevented from being overvalued, as it would be in tragedy, by the turn of conversation. In discussing the chain, dialogue switches to another object: 'from my finger [he] snatch'd that ring' (V.1.277). The ring, another physically small item, interrupts the focus on the chain. The ring is another circulating token in the play that has also gone astray, along with a bag of gold. The multiplicity of items prevents any one attaining the sacred significance of the handkerchief in *Othello*. The chain exists alongside these two other erratic objects, none of which gain the level of importance that affords them a causal status like the

⁴ In 1693 Thomas Rymer objects to *Othello* on the grounds of its 'foul disproportion', 'Which instead of moving pity, or any passion Tragical and Reasonable, can produce nothing but horror and aversion, and what is odious and grievous to an Audience'. Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (London 1693), p. 121. See also G. F. Parker, 'Foul Disproportion: Rymer on *Othello*', *Cambridge Quarterly* (1988) Vol.17 Issue 1, 17-27.

⁵ Tragedy refuses to step back, to remove the focus from the handkerchief: it is a subject to which Othello continually returns despite Desdemona's attempts to turn the conversation away: Othello, 'The handkerchief!' Desdemona, 'I pray, talk me of Cassio.' Othello, 'The handkerchief!' (III.4.91-3).

handkerchief; their consequence remains relatively casual in comedy, preventing the escalation of error to tragedy.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, wordplay is enabled by the doubling of the twins, who are themselves embodied puns. The consequence of errors, misunderstandings and wanderings is a diversion into a comically double realm, a proliferation of impossibility and coincidence before the reunion of the family. In comparison, Iago's wordplay is also punning and ironic, and frequently has two referents for every signifier. However, this has serious and irresistible results that lead directly to death. His wordplay is darkly flexible. When Iago says 'I am honest' we know he is not; when he proclaims himself to be a villain in front of the other characters they believe he is being ironic but he is actually speaking truthfully.⁶ His revelation of his intentions perversely conceals them from other characters. His wordplay works on two levels, similar to *Errors* which also uses dramatic irony, creating two levels of meaning. When Angelo tells Antipholus he has already given him the chain – 'Come, come, you know I gave it you even now' – in one sense he has and in another he has not, since he has given it to his twin (IV.1.55). The dramatic irony takes on a comic form, whereas in *Othello* it accentuates the audience's perception of Iago's malicious desire.

Like physical objects, wordplay can also have greater consequences in the tragic context. It is Macbeth's inability to distinguish the different potential interpretations of the witches' language that leads him to believe that the impossible could be possible. The witches both warn and entice Macbeth and his error is to make the wrong choice regarding their meaning. Macbeth later becomes aware of the witches' ambiguities about which he was once so certain: 'I pull in resolution; and

⁶ For more on 'honest' in *Othello*, see Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), pp. 218-49.

begin | To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend, | That lies like truth' (V.5.41-43). The words subvert their own meaning: they have the semblance of truth but are intentionally misleading. Macbeth mistakes their ambiguity for truth in order to believe his interpretation of their promise. He does this conscious of the potential for error – 'This supernatural soliciting | Cannot be ill, cannot be good' – but still chooses to believe in his future greatness (I.3.130-1). The scenes with the witches are the nexus of the tragedy, which leads him falsely to believe that the prophesised events are to his good fortune (I.1, I.3, III.5, IV.1). Macbeth's error is tragic: the play presents the horrific irrevocability of making the wrong choice and its moral implications that lead 'The way to dusty death' (V.5.23).

At the end of *Hamlet*, Horatio represents tragedy as accidental error:

So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts;
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause;
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th' inventors' heads. (V.2.380-5)

The implied theory is that error is central to tragedy. Horatio suggests that tragedy is an accidental judgement, easily and blindly made from which there is no profit: the 'inventor' of the action will inevitably suffer. Horatio nihilistically describes the events of the tragedy, from which there is no redemption. He terms the slaughters 'casual', but in doing so he draws attention to the ease with which the killings are carried out rather than their lack of consequence. The 'casual' tragic error is 'accidental', associating error with misfortune and chance rather than lack of causality.

Horatio's future narrative of the tragedy contains both 'casual slaughters' and deaths of 'forc'd cause'. 'Casual' and 'causal' are not contrasted here in terms of consequence, because even a 'casual' act can be a slaughter. Instead the oppositional

phrase ‘casual slaughters’ is used to emphasise both the unnaturalness of the murders he has witnessed, such as Hamlet’s murder of Polonius, and that seemingly insignificant action can have much greater unforeseen implication, as Desdemona’s handkerchief does in *Othello*. These ‘casual’ accidents contrast with the premeditation of ‘forc’d cause’, which Horatio links with the ‘cunning’ of certain characters. The ‘forc’d cause’ could refer to a cause the murderer has themselves designed, such as Claudius’s murder of his own brother. It may also refer to those who are compelled to act. Such is Hamlet’s position when he discovers that his Uncle has murdered his father: he is ‘prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell’, yet he is ‘unpregnant of my cause, And can say nothing’. His ‘cause’, though ‘forc’d’ produces only his hesitation.

Aristotle first identified this involuntary or ‘casual’ aspect of error in tragedy. He linked *hamartema* (mistake) with *atuchema* (unintended misfortune). Shakespeare borrows this sense, foregrounding the involuntary character of error and often disastrous consequences. A calamity occurs accidentally, and the victim remains powerless. For Aristotle, error or *hamartia* is an important plot device. The best plot involves a change from ‘good fortune to misfortune, not because of wickedness but because of a great error’.⁷ For example, Oedipus kills Laius and marries Jocasta, unaware they are his parents, and Lear misinterprets Cordelia’s refusal to flatter, and the tragedy unfolds. A tragic figure for Aristotle is a person who is neither perfect in virtue and justice, nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity, but rather, one who is the victim of what Aristotle calls *hamartia*. The *hamartia* that he associates with tragedy need imply very little in the way of moral, to say nothing of spiritual, culpability. More recent interpretations suggest

⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*, bk.1, 4.1.1, p. 16.

that *hamartia* is an accident that might befall anyone.⁸ Shakespeare's use of Aristotelian tragedy centralises error, making it the accidental cause of tragedy. In comedy, error is also of an accidental kind, without cause or culpability of the character, but the difference is in its result. Error in tragedy leads to great suffering whereas in comedy, as I have argued, it is intercepted by the lighter expectations of genre convention. This is exemplified by *The Comedy of Errors* in which the proliferation of mistakes never has tragic consequences, despite the continual violence in the play (see chapter three). Another example is *MSND*, where Puck's errors lead only to misplaced affections (see chapter four).

The sense of error changes between comedy and tragedy, yet it is crucial to both genres. What happens then to error in other plays that mix these genres? I will focus on *Cymbeline* – variously termed pastoral; historical pastoral; tragicomedy; romance; a late play — in order to answer this question. Its genre constantly shifts between comedy, pastoral, romance, tragedy, tragicomedy, and revenge tragedy, and, I would argue, beyond into satire, sometimes not only within the same scene but within the same sentence, creating uncertainties of reading. The mix of genres is so fluent that it throws the audience into a state of confusion, inviting them to mistake the genre, or to laugh when they should cry.⁹ It mixes genre to such an extent that it becomes resistant to categorisation, especially for an early modern understanding of the theory of genre that works primarily with fixed categories.

⁸ See Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare Dramatic Genres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 27.

⁹ Most obviously this occurs with the beheading of Cloten. Imogen mistakes the headless body for that of her husband, Posthumus because the corpse is wearing his clothes. This slip of identity operates in a context of disguise and mistaken identity that comes directly from comedy. For example in *Twelfth Night*, Viola disguises herself as Cesario and Olivia mistakenly falls in love with her. In *MSND*, as explored in the previous chapter, Puck mistakenly identifies Lysander for Demetrius and applies a magic potion to the wrong lover. This device of comedy prompts us to find Cloten's beheading funny, and that combined with the stark lack of remorse from any of the characters over his death obscures its potential pathos. It is not violence which determines genre: that because Cloten's beheading is a violent act it makes it a tragedy. In *The Comedy of Errors* the response to the mistaken identity of the twin Dromios is violence: they are constantly physically abused yet the play remains a comedy.

3.5.1.1.1 Early Modern Decorum

To understand genre in the early modern period, and where Shakespeare's plays fit into these categories, we first need to understand ideas of decorum that determine genre. Angel Day states that 'decorum, is sayde to be neate, apte, and comelie, the contrarie whereof as altogeather impugned, is sayde to be vnmeete or vnseemely.'¹⁰ To be decorous is to work neatly within the defining conventions of a category, to create content that is appropriate to the genre. He continues that 'Decorum, when of a common and meane cause wee yeeld common and playne speeches: An indecorum agayne, when vppon a grosse conceite: a trifling toye a matter of no valewe, wee seeke to frame high and loftie sentences.'¹¹ For Day, indecorousness is to present something of little value in a disproportionate or incongruous way, just as Othello misjudges the significance of Desdemona's handkerchief. Decorum is a kind of adherence to expectation and therefore, in the dramatic context, requires having an understanding of genre conventions. To write decorously is to match form and content, to make them agree: 'A matter of grauity deliuered with weight, a matter of sorrow reported with griefe, a matter of pastime discoursed with pleasure, a matter of follie intermingled with laughter, doe eche shewe the decorum therein contained'.¹²

Ben Jonson defines decorum in terms of propriety – of parts that belong. On the title page of *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* is quoted a line from Horace's *Art of Poetry*: 'Let each kind stay in its own appropriate place' (*Singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decenter*).¹³ This is the motto of literary decorum. Jonson's invocation of place makes indecorum a kind of vagrancy, as that which is itinerant, has no

¹⁰ Day, *The English secretorie*, p. 15.

¹¹ Day, *The English secretorie*, p. 15.

¹² Day, *The English secretorie*, pp. 15-6.

¹³ See Title Page of *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* (London, 1616) at *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 19 November 2014].

settled home or is disreputable or dishonest,¹⁴ thus returning us to error as a form of wandering. Indecorum is failing to match the content to its form, to include something that does not belong, and to treat matter unexpectedly, even absurdly: ‘to a person sorrowfull to write of iestes, to talk learnedly vnto a clown, to salute an olde man with childishe fantasies, in causes of common wealth to aduaunce trifles’.¹⁵ Laughter is appropriate to comedy, tears sorrow, and politics with seriousness, Day argues.¹⁶ This conceptualisation of decorum is echoed by Erasmus, who describes the ‘sin’ of those who ‘mix the sordid with the elegant, disfigure their purple with patches, thread together jewels and paste, and add garlic to Greek confections’.¹⁷ This non-radical theory of literature asks for the reader not to be shocked, for the world to be as expected. Henri Estienne represents a breach of decorum as being so reprehensible as to have a strong physical effect. Describing what he perceives as a highly indecorous book, *Legenda Aurea*, he claims that ‘there are many passages so far from *Decorum*, that if the reader be tender harted or squeamish stomacked, it wil make them Seasicke to peruse them.’¹⁸ This suggests the strength of breaches of literary decorum as highly provocative and undesirable.

Roger Ascham also discusses the negative effects of indecorousness on the reader, claiming that breaking the rules of decorum can be corrupting. His discussion illustrates how an early modern conception of decorum has recourse to classical texts. In fact, decorum is the imitation of classicism. Ascham is prescriptive: he advises reading ‘*Terence, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, or else Aristophanus, Sophocles, Homer, and Pindar*’ and then the reader should ‘diligently’ note ‘the difference they

¹⁴ According to the *OED*, a vagrant is not merely one with no settled home, but one who maintains themselves in a disreputable or dishonest fashion. See ‘vagrant’ entry in *OED* at <www.oed.com> [date accessed 14 September 2014].

¹⁵ Day, *The English secretorie*, pp. 15-6.

¹⁶ Day, *The English secretorie*, pp. 15-6.

¹⁷ Erasmus, *Copia*, ed. Thompson, p. 307.

¹⁸ Henri Estienne, *The stage of popish toyes* (London, 1581), p. 64 at *EEBO* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> [accessed 12 November 2013].

vse, in proprietie of wordes, in forme of sentence, in handlyng of their matter, [then] he shall easelie perceiue, what is fitte and *decorum* in euerie one'.¹⁹ According to Ascham, these classical authors determine the rules by which all writers should work. A writer should attend to the similarities between the works of several authors to determine what is conventional. They should then use the perception of that rule as a guide to the boundaries of decorum. He complains, however, that Renaissance tragedy does not display such decorous principles: 'Some in *England*, moe in *France*, *Germanie*, and *Italie*, also haue written Tragedies in our tyme: of the which, not one I am sure is able to abyde the trew touch of *Aristotles* preceptes, and *Euripides* examples, saue onely two, that euer I saw'.²⁰ Contemporary tragedies across Europe fail to follow this model. According to Ascham's prescriptions, all Shakespeare's tragedies would be indecorous, and therefore vagrant, because they fail to follow classical models in their content and form.

3.5.1.1.2 Shakespeare's Genre

Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates the type of indecorousness defined by Day above, in framing a matter of 'no valewe' in 'high and loftie sentences', or vice versa. For example, in *Hamlet*, Ophelia's death is treated irreverently, with two clowns digging the grave who parody the process of law that determines whether she should receive a Christian burial. They make a mockery of the seriousness of the law with some phoney legal reasoning: 'an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform; [argal], she drown'd herself wittingly' (V.1.11-3).²¹ In so doing they frame Ophelia's death comically. One Clown tells a joke but then cannot remember the punchline, confessing 'Mass, I cannot tell' (V.1.55). The other Clown then sings

¹⁹ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, p. 57, Ri.r.

²⁰ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, p. 57, Ri.r.

²¹ '[Argal]' is from F1, a departure from the copy text, Q2, which has 'or all'.

about time and death whilst digging the grave (V.1.61-4, 71-4). Hamlet comments on the impropriety of such fooling: ‘Has this fellow no feeling of his business?’ to which Horatio responds ‘Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness’ (V.1.65). Here ‘property’ is linked with ‘propriety’ in that ‘easiness’ has become an attribute of gravedigging, and therefore the Gravediggers’ behaviour is not improper. Horatio explains that custom can alter the ‘property’ of objects, so that digging graves can be ‘casual’ in the comic sense of insignificant. Despite Horatio’s explanation, on Day’s criteria this scene is indecorous.

Macbeth similarly contains a moment of light-heartedness alongside dark tragedy. In Act II Scene 2 Lady Macbeth takes the bloody daggers from Macbeth who has just murdered the King. Their dialogue is punctuated by unanswered ‘knocking’, increasing their suspenseful apprehension at the discovery of the King’s body (II.2.54, 62, 66, 70). The knocking is continued into the next scene with the Porter, who comically tries to engage it in conversation, dispersing its dramatic tension: ‘Knock, knock, knock! Who’s there? Faith, here’s an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose.’ (II.3.12-4). Macduff is the knocker who discovers the dead King, but this discovery is suspended by the Porter and his comic dialogue. He tells Macduff and Lennox of his ‘carousing’, bawdily punning on Macduff’s ‘lie’, that alcohol ‘makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off’ (II.2.32-3). This short scene with the drunken, licentious Porter is a moment of levity in the middle of regicide. Indecorum of this type is not just confined to tragedy. In *Cymbeline* the Jailor’s play with Posthumous’s imminent hanging as a kind of ‘cooking’ treats death in a low manner through black comedy (a scene discussed below). In *MSND*, Bottom takes an object of little significance and treats it in a high style. He describes the lowly desires of an ass to scratch and eat hay in a

formal, overblown manner: ‘Truly, a peck of provender; I could munch your good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow’ (II.2.31-4). The speech is funny in its absurdity, effected by Bottom’s indecorum.

Critics have argued that Shakespeare wilfully and consciously broke the rules of propriety that determine decorum.²² Lawrence Danson asserts that ‘Shakespeare *chose* rather than merely happened to disobey the “precept,” as he chose to bring together the tragic matter of kings with the comic matter of clowns.’²³ Some of Shakespeare’s plays adhere to the propriety of certain genres better than others. The category of romance that contains *The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest* seems particularly problematic. ‘Romance is one of the more slippery of critical terms’, as Danson claims.²⁴ Many earlier comedies have elements of romance: *The Comedy of Errors* reunites lost children and their parents and a god descends in *As You Like It*. Romance, some critics have argued, is defined by mixed genre, tragicomedy, and, as such, is an inherently indecorous genre.²⁵ *Cymbeline*, as one of these tricky romances, was problematic from its earliest categorisation. It was labelled a tragedy in the First Folio, a category it strongly resists, and one that seems a long way from romance.²⁶

²² Comparison with other authors, especially Jonson with would highlight the specificity of Shakespearean practice but such a comparison lies beyond the scope of this project.

²³ Lawrence Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix: Romance, Tragicomedy, and Shakespeare’s “distinct kind”’, in *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*, ed. Anthony R. Guneratne, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 101-120, pp. 112-3. For more on romance in the Renaissance, see Helen Moore, ‘Romance’ in *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 238-48; Alex Davis, *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003); and Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

²⁴ Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix’, p. 104.

²⁵ Janette Dillon, ‘Tragicomedy’, *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169-84.

²⁶ The title page in the first Folio names it ‘The Tragedie of Cymbeline’. See *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies Histories and Tragedies* (London, 1623) at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 28 April 2014].

Yet this difficulty of genre is productive. Danson states that ‘every one of Shakespeare’s plays poses a problem to anyone who has a fixed idea of how the play should work, an idea that bumps up against the energetic problem of the unruly particular.’²⁷ If we consider a genre to have distinct properties that can then be applied to a play, Shakespeare confounds the idea of genre with his constant mixing of one with another. The application of genre works from an idea of the correct and finds Shakespeare to be in error. Yet for Danson it is this stubbornness, this difficulty or resistance that gives a play its thrust and purpose; it proves to be an ‘energetic problem’.²⁸ The effect of genre is as much in the breach as the observance of a set of expectations. Shakespeare’s faulty genre provides momentum through the questions it raises for the audience and in the way it confounds expectation. The clash of different modes is not then a problem but a method of production. Generic error is generative for a play.

Despite the problems of romance as a genre in Shakespeare, Danson defends it: ‘Romance is an intrinsically mixed mode that holds in suspension tragedy, comedy, and even history [...] we see tragedy and comedy participating in one another at the same time that we recognize their difference.’²⁹ He settles the problem of opposite generic elements by perceiving the genres as at once separate and united. Tragicomedy brings opposites together. Referring to resurrections in romances, he states that ‘A “quick” (i.e., living) corpse is an impossibility of the sort that romance makes plausible. It is overdetermined and inexplicable, like the statue of Hermione, which is at once a memorial to death and the proof of life.’³⁰ Tragicomedy impossibly holds together oppositions, for example life and death, and in doing so it

²⁷ Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix’, p. 113.

²⁸ Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix’, p. 113.

²⁹ Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix’, p. 116.

³⁰ Danson, ‘The Shakespeare Remix’, p. 116.

becomes a mixed form. In combining two genres, tragicomedy is excessive, ‘grosse’ and ‘unseemly’. Danson’s diagnosis of Shakespearean romance is useful in explaining *Cymbeline*’s muddled genre as indecorous. In placing elements of tragedy and comedy together it refuses to ‘[l]et each kind stay in its own appropriate place’.

Sidney criticises tragicomedy for its indecorousness: ‘hauing indeed no right Comedy, in that comicall part of our Tragedy, wee haue nothing but scurrility’.³¹ Because of its absence of rectitude and propriety, he describes such a play as a ‘mungrell Tragy-comedie’, that ‘be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies’.³² ‘Mungrell’ implies crossbreeding, or having an indeterminate origin. Furthermore, it can refer to a person of low or indeterminate status.³³ Sidney, therefore, terms tragicomedies ‘mungrells’ as a form of debasement because it is indecorous, lacking the ‘right’ and proper place.³⁴

A mixed genre has implications for interpreting error. If an understanding of error is dependent on genre, error in a fundamentally mixed genre becomes troubled and any potential secure meaning is concealed. Error, in an external and internal sense, seems to be in conflict: if genre is an external structure that can be applied to a literary work to aid understanding, Shakespeare’s faulty genre is a kind of external error. Moreover, this destabilised genre problematises the interpretation of plot errors that are internal to the drama. Error in this reciprocal relation only increases the uncertainty of reading and the potential for misreading.

³¹ Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, Sig.K3v.

³² Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, Sig.K2r.

³³ See the *OED* at <www.oed.com> [accessed 14 September 2014].

³⁴ Cf ‘gallimaufry’, originally being a dish consisting of odds and ends of food, but also figuratively referring to a heterogeneous, even ridiculous medley. See the *OED* at www.oed.com, [accessed 14 September 2014]. In the sixteenth century, the term was applied to language. E. K. in Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calender* claims ‘So now they haue made our English tongue a gallimaufrey, or hodgepodge of all other speches.’ Epilogue, Dedication. Thomas Dekker uses it to refer to a type of ridiculous speech that mocks affected, scholarly discourse. Farneze uses ‘gallimaufry’ to describe Emuloes Sir Owen’s speech, which follows: ‘I protest to you, the magnitude of my condolement, hath bin eleuated the higher to see you and my selfe’. Thomas Dekker, *The pleasant comodie of patient Grisill* (1603), C2 r., *EEBO* at <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 28 April 2014].

3.5.1.1.3 Oppositions in Genre

Although faulty genre may increase erratic reading as suggested above, the concept of genre may well be less straightforward than it appears. It is therefore worth raising the question whether this faultiness is inherent in genre itself. Genre has been described in oppositional terms as being ‘highly structured, yet [...] also flexible’.³⁵ In a significant study of genre theory from the late-twentieth century, Alastair Fowler distances himself from its definition as classificatory: it is not simply a structure used to label texts.³⁶ He argues that genres are not mutually exclusive.³⁷ They can change over time and respond to new works that redefine or add to the genre. In fact, Fowler goes so far as to assert ‘genres at all levels are positively resistant to definition’.³⁸ Instead of struggling with genre as a fixed definition, he advocates the ‘family resemblance’ theory that ‘[r]epresentatives of a genre may then be regarded as making up a family whose sects and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all.’³⁹ Sidney describes genre that transgresses the boundaries of decorum as ‘faulty’, yet in the context of modern genre theory, Shakespeare’s faulty genre looks decidedly less so.⁴⁰

Fowler’s is, perhaps, only a more theoretical way of noticing similarity between certain works without going so far as limiting that relation. It does, however, face up to the transience of a more rigorous definition: ‘Definitions of genre can hardly be stated, before they are falsified.’⁴¹ Where does this leave the act of naming a genre: can we still call a tragedy a tragedy? Fowler proposes a corrective

³⁵ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 3. See also Rosalie Colie, *Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

³⁶ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 37.

³⁷ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 38.

³⁸ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 40.

³⁹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie*, Sig.K2v.

⁴¹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 42.

for thinking about genre, stating that ‘We should always be acquiring, never using, generic information.’⁴² But where does that leave an approach to genre from the Renaissance that perceives genre as a fixed category? The sources from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century quoted above suggest that genre constraints were quite rigid in the Renaissance, but only in theory. In practice genre could also be fluid, as demonstrated by Shakespeare’s approach in *Cymbeline*. He confounds these theoretical expectations, energising the play through this tension and creating the conditions that enable alternative readings.

3.5.1.1.4 Genre in Tension

Stephen Greenblatt recognises the tensions in genre that can lead to conflicting interpretations. He refers to a ‘living work of art’ when describing the competing social, historical, authorial and (most relevant to this discussion) generic forces that jostle to determine representation.⁴³ Greenblatt’s description of a work of art as ‘living’ is useful when understanding the generic shift of another puzzling, paradoxical moment in Shakespearean drama. The moving statue in *The Winter’s Tale* symbolises Shakespeare’s resistance to follow generic conventions in the sense that the art is ‘living’ – reactive, changeable and perhaps even self-determining.⁴⁴ The statue, a reified metaphor, then becomes a symbol of generic resistance. The motionless statue represents genre: fixed, unchanging, classical, willing to receive contemplation but never changing in response. Genre, in this guise, is static. Shakespeare invigorates the statue, and thus genre, with the tensive energy of conflict, asking the audience to consider the miraculous moment within the bounds

⁴² Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 51-2.

⁴³ Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion’, in *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*, 39-66, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Furthermore, there are associations of walking and wandering that relate back to wandering error explored in chapter four 2.4.2.

of comedy and tragedy, which modern critical opinion perceives as being squeezed and synthesised into the new form of romance.⁴⁵

The statue functions as a sign of the exaltation of Hermione to a mythologized level, where the heroic and the tragic meet. Comedy arises from the incongruity of the statue's ability to move, to do the thing that refutes its definition as a statue, to walk away, and perhaps to a lesser extent to make the audience laugh at an image of classical authority. The broader generic implications here are important. If the statue in *The Winter's Tale* is a classical one then we move from the heroic to the mock-heroic. This satirisation is Shakespeare moving beyond rhetoric and classical conventions.

The statue recalled to life is perhaps typical of romance, yet it is more than this. It is related to generic resistance: it has a radical desire to push boundaries and to represent what is strictly generically impossible. Dillon claims that the walking statue represents 'the classic tragicomic move from death to life.'⁴⁶ More generally the walking statue represents romance's propensity to wander, be resistant and to embrace the impossible. We could argue, therefore, that this characteristic moment of romance also represents generic opposition, suggesting that such resistance is an essential part of romance; the statue is not supposed to move just as the genre is not supposed to wander. This might explain why romance is a genre that contains so much tension, as explored below in the oppositional, even paradoxical language in *Cymbeline*, and an ending that is irreconcilable with the rest of the play.

⁴⁵ As Roger Warren points out, to apply the category 'Romance' is a relatively recent development. Warren, 'Introduction', p. 15. Edward Dowden describes the 'Romantic element' and 'sweet serenity' of *Cymbeline*. Dowden, *Cymbeline* (London: Methuen, 1903) pp. xi-xii. Referring to *Cymbeline*'s initial inclusion as a tragedy, Butler later argues that '[t]his looks like a category error, but arguably it is only our modern assumptions about romance that make the arrangement seem unsuitable.' Butler, 'Introduction' (2006), pp. 15-7. Hallett Smith claims that the 'tradition to which *Cymbeline* belongs is that of romance'. Smith, 'Cymbeline' in *Riverside Shakespeare* (1997), 1565-8, p. 1565.

⁴⁶ Dillon, 'Tragicomedy', p. 170. As the Shepherd says, 'Thou metst with things dying, I with things new-born. Here's a sight for thee' (3.3.103-5).

Such refutation of rules causes problems of interpretation. Paul Innes argues that *Cymbeline* ‘violently yokes together massively disparate elements that are then subsumed into a grand reconciliation. The resolution of the conflicts engendered in the play is not going to be an easy or straightforward process.’⁴⁷ Kiernan Ryan agrees, claiming that ‘*Cymbeline* has seemed to many a radically incoherent play. Despite the deliberate bravura of the recognition scene, in which all the plots are yoked violently together, the play does not cohere.’⁴⁸ Leah Marcus questions our ability even to read the play because of this.⁴⁹ The thrust of critical opinion suggests that, because its parts do not fit coherently together, *Cymbeline* is an indecorous play and therefore faulty. From this we can conclude that the category of romance is characterised by misreading and error. Romance is a wandering genre and Shakespeare exploits this in *Cymbeline*, pushing further the inherent faultiness of the genre.

3.5.1.2 *In the Mix: Comedy and Tragedy*

The previous section argued that our understanding of error depends on its generic context, and that Shakespeare’s genre is, as a result of its mixing of generic elements, in error. This section proceeds to the textual analysis of *Cymbeline* in order to determine what happens to error when genre is faulty. Cloten and Imogen’s interactions are examined to demonstrate the play’s mixing of comic and tragic elements. Romance as tragicomedy presents a problem of ‘fit’ between comedy and tragedy. If *Cymbeline* is a ‘tragedy’ as the first Folio claims, how are we to understand its comic parts? If it is a romantic comedy, how are we to take the

⁴⁷ Paul Innes, ‘Books, *Cymbeline* and Empire’, *Critical Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2007), 1-18, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Janet Adelman, ‘Masculine Authority and the Maternal Body: The Return to Origins in *Cymbeline*’, *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, ed. Kiernan Ryan, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 107-133, p. 108.

⁴⁹ Leah Marcus, ‘*Cymbeline* and the Unease of Topicality’, in *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, ed. Kiernan Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 134-68, p. 158.

moments of tragedy? Cloten's soliloquys, for example, reveal his tragic ambitions: 'Posthumus, thy head, which now is growing upon thy shoulders, shall within this hour be off... out, sword, and to a sore purpose!' (IV.1.15-6, 22-3). He seems to be ruminating in a tragic mode, imagining raping Imogen, who will then be for Posthumus 'thy mistress enforce'd' (IV.1.17). Yet an earlier soliloquy has a touch of comedy, where he says he will ask one of Imogen's women to 'lawyer to me, for I yet not understand the case myself' (II.3.74-5). Despite Cloten's ambition to become a tragic villain, his ability is comically placed in question.

Cloten declares his love for Imogen and she humiliates him in return, claiming that Posthumus's 'meanest garment [...] is dearer in my respect than all the hairs above thee' (II.3.134-5). Cloten replies 'His garment? Now the devil—' (II.3.136). Imogen cuts off his speech and Cloten is left spluttering with rage. It is possible that his repetition of "'his garments'" is not an expression of rage but puzzlement. He does not understand Imogen's words therefore he does not act on the insult. This is consistent with the characterisation of Cloten as a fool, as a 'clodpoll', meaning thick-headed, an insult Guiderius employs when he throws Cloten's head into the river: 'I have sent Cloten's clotpole down the stream' (IV.2.184). Cloten's words that close the scene suggest that his revenge will be ineffectual, as he repeats once more "'His mean'st garment'"? Well' (II.4.156). This is confirmed by later events; despite describing in detail how he will kill Posthumus at Milford Haven (III.5.130-45), he fails to do this and is killed himself.

Imogen wittily deflects Cloten's advances, saying 'If you but said so, 'twere as deep with me. If you swear still, your recompense is still | That I regard it not' (II.3.91-2). Yet this scene is not purely comic in tone. Speaking aside to Pisanio, Imogen says 'I am sprited with a fool, Frighted, and angered worse.' (II.3.139).

Imogen's confession informs us that she is not amused by this incident but afraid—she takes it seriously, suggesting that her playfulness with language is not comic and not the same as the witty, somewhat riddling, exchanges of Feste and Maria in *Twelfth Night* (I.5.1-31), for example. Imogen's speech is the wordplay of tragedy, where wordplay guards against the threat and violence of another.⁵⁰

Shakespeare refuses to let us see Imogen's relation with Cloten as one of comic mockery, or of a great lady being seduced by a hopeless idiot. She describes him as 'that harsh, noble, simple nothing, | That Cloten, whose love suit hath been to me | As fearful as a seige' (III.4.132-4). 'Noble' is sardonic, a nod towards the comic, but the rest of her description is characterised by fear. We are prevented from resting with comedy and Imogen's words demand a response to both their comic and tragic elements. Imogen seems to be both afraid and amused by Cloten, and equally his mode of expression is dualistic. He declares of Imogen 'I love and hate her' (III.5.70). He first details the ways in which 'she hath all courtly parts more exquisite' before turning halfway through his speech to condemn her love for the 'low Posthumus' that spoils her finer parts: 'what's else rare is choked' (III.5.76). At times such as this Cloten shows signs of being more than a mere fool, demonstrating a capacity for argument and imagination, however bizarre. Yet Shakespeare plays with his ambiguous status as Cloten does not quite become a wise fool, nor the ignorant victim of the joke. He says of Imogen 'I will conclude to hate her, nay indeed, | To be revenged upon her. For when fools shall—' (III.5.88-9). Again,

⁵⁰ For example, standing in the grave with death all around, the wordplay between Hamlet and the Clownish Gravediggers is blackly comic. The Clown disputes with Hamlet whose grave it is in which he stands, both continually punning on 'lie'. Hamlet says 'Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.' The Clown replies with a self-conscious reference to their witty dialogue: "'Tis a quick lie, sir, 'twill away again from me to you.' (V.1.125-9). The comic dialogue insulates them from the tragic nature of Ophelia's death. Other comic moments within tragedy perform a similar function. In *King Lear*, the Fool insulates himself from the serious consequence and promised violence of Lear's whipping with his rhymes (I.4.117-27), songs (I.4.166-9) and symbols (I.4.158-63). Through the form of his fooling he manages to call Lear a bitter fool, to point out his mistakes and to suggest that he is empty-headed.

Cloten calls for revenge, and again Shakespeare attaches that cry of vengeance to foolery, for the ‘fool’ of which Cloten speaks is self-referential.

In the earlier scene where Cloten attempts to seduce Imogen, Pisanio constantly comically interrupts their dialogue. Later it is Imogen turning aside to speak to Pisanio that cuts off Cloten:

Imogen	How now, Pisanio!	
<i>Enter Pisanio</i>		
Cloten	His garment? Now the devil—	
Imogen	(<i>to Pisanio</i>) To Dorothy my woman hie thee presently.	
Cloten	His garment?	
Imogen	(<i>to Pisanio</i>) I am sprited with a fool	(II.3.133-6)

She repeatedly turns to Pisanio as a way of deflecting Cloten. As a messenger Pisanio does not just serve the purpose of conveying information, he bars their communication perhaps even physically, with a touch of farce. The messenger repeatedly interrupts the Prince in his declaration of love, which is not eloquent, flowing and persuasive but is rendered fragmented and incoherent by the physical interpolations of another character. Cloten’s cry for vengeance is parodied by its combination with his foolery. This is comedy laughing at tragedy, and tragedy takes its revenge on comedy with the most gruesome act of beheading Cloten, the fool.

Cloten’s behaviour seems to aspire to revenge tragedy and to the eloquent and profound speeches that accompany that genre. He imagines killing Posthumus and making a speech of contemptuous triumph: ‘He on the ground, my speech of insultment ended on his dead body’ (III.5.140-1). Yet his own speech is in prose not verse, the latter being the form associated most often with dramatic poetry. The play never quite descends into fully-fledged tragedy. For example, if Cloten’s death is a tragic act, it is a bloodless one. The thrust, force and gore of tragedy are tempered by comedy, just as aspects of comedy are not purely funny, as in the modulation of Imogen’s wordplay to Cloten in the face of his aggression. The first person to see

Cloten's dead body and Imogen clinging to it, Lucius, conceals the horribleness of the scene by figuring Cloten as a fallen ruin: 'what trunk is here | Without his top? The ruin speaks that sometime | It was a worthy building.' (IV.2.353-5). Tragedy is censored by metaphor in an uncomfortable attempt to contain death within romantic comedy.

Yet this is not entirely successful. Romance is characterised by miraculous resurrection, by movement from death to life. Cloten's death is anomalous in romance because he stays firmly dead, with no chance of miraculous revival.⁵¹ The impossibility of romance makes living corpses possible but not in this instance. With the body dismembered there is no chance of any mistake. This explains why beheading is the mode of death: Guiderius hacked the head off romance, preventing romantic accidents, the kind of mistake that enables resurrection and is peculiar to Shakespeare's romances. For example, in *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes mistakenly believes that Hermione is dead because he has seen her '(As I thought) dead; and have (in vain) said many a prayer upon her grave' (V.3.139-41). It is only through this mistake that she can return to life in the final scene, 'to be stone no more' (V.3.99). In the co-authored play, *Pericles*, Pericles believes that his wife Thaisa died in childbirth. Her reappearance at the end of the play prompts Pericles to ask 'How this dead queen re-lives?' (V.3.63). Imogen's belief in Posthumus's death works in the same manner, with a mistaken belief in a character's death that leads to a type of resurrection. Imogen declares, 'That headless man I thought had been my lord', making her reunion with him all the more surprising (V.5.299). Although Cloten's death enables Posthumus to have this typical miraculous revival, Cloten's death remains horrific. It is announced by Guiderius interrupting Belarius and Arviragus

⁵¹ Of course, in performance this moment can be comic. If Cloten and Posthumus are played by the same actor Posthumus (aptly) survives the death of Cloten and through the doubling the moment is fundamentally comic.

carrying Cloten's head (IV.2.112 S.D.).⁵² The body and the death it represents haunt the scene, as Belarius reappears later with the headless cadaver for burial (IV.2.282 S.D.). Cloten's death remains anomalous as his revival is displaced onto Posthumus. This murder that appears in the middle of a romance disrupts genre expectations by resisting resurrection.

3.5.1.2.2 Opposition, Genre and Error

Romance deals in the fantastically improbable and impossible. This creates difficulty for the characters in reasoning about such events. At the end of the play Posthumus speaks in oppositional language, as a response to the world of generic tension in which he finds himself. I would argue that this is related to the play's genre in two ways. First, romance is magically inflected, which permits strange events to occur. The world of the play and characters' position in it are destabilised, caught as they are between providence and coincidence, magic and danger. For example, Posthumus is subject to two determining forces, the first being Jupiter who declares that 'He shall be lord of Lady Imogen' (V.4.107), while in the same scene he is incarcerated by the Britains where his fate is to be determined in a different direction, to face a 'heavy reckoning' and be hanged (V.4.156). Secondly, because *Cymbeline* mixes genres, the characters meet further uncertainty because their own world is ill-fitting and incoherent. Posthumus, for example, hesitates in his reactions because of his failure to interpret correctly what is before him. On being reunited with Imogen he mistakes her, saying 'Shall's have a play of this? [...] *He strikes her down*' (V.5.228). He does not know whether this is a playful or serious moment. The certainty of a coherent generic world has been compromised because the play's status as a

⁵² Although in the first Folio the stage direction is just '*Enter Guiderius*', this can reasonably be expanded to '*with Cloten's head*' because Guiderius announces the onstage presence of the head himself: 'Yet I not doing this, the fool had borne my head as I do his.' (IV.2.116-7).

romantic comedy is undermined. Uncertainties are created for the characters as well as the audience. This is exemplified through Posthumus's speech; his use of opposition or paradox expresses that he sees the world in a variety of different and possibly conflicting ways.

Posthumus has a vision, the meaning of which is plural and irresolvable in its complexity: 'either both or nothing, | Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such | As sense cannot untie' (V.4.146-148). The thrice-repeated 'or' continually alters the meaning of the phrase. His perception of the vision is generalised by his statement that 'the action of my life is like it' (V.4.149). The meaning of both his vision and his own speech is evasive and impenetrable. Posthumus is the tragic figure who faces and attempts to express complexity, dissolving into metaphor and opposition. Yet immediately after this tragic, mournful and defeated speech he shares an extended comic metaphor with his Jailer that conflates readiness for death with cooking:

Jailer	Come sir, are you ready for death?
Posthumus	Over-roasted rather; ready long ago.
Jailer	Hanging is the word, sir. If you be ready for that, you are well cooked

(V.4.151-4)

After such serious melancholy, Posthumus turns towards farcical tragedy, yet another genre.⁵³ The world cannot be contained by tragedy, but rather segues into comedy seeking another mode of expression, another one of Posthumus's 'ors'. This is turned into a black joke by the Jailer, who recognises the difficulty of Posthumus's position: 'of this contradiction you shall now be quit.' (V.4.165-6). He says 'you know not which way you shall go' (V.4.176). This is not just Posthumus's disorientation but his inability to choose between the paths of his 'contradiction'.⁵⁴ The Jailer parodies

⁵³ Or gallows humour. Cf *Titus Andronicus*, where Titus serves Chiron and Demetrius to Tamora in a pie, encouraging Tamora and Saturninus, 'Although the cheer be poor, 'Twill fill your stomachs, please you eat of it.' (V.3.28-9).

⁵⁴ This returns us to erratic wandering, see chapters three and four.

the versified and lyrical 'Fear no more the heat o'the sun' speech (IV.2.259-64), with his own quotidian pronouncement: 'fear no more tavern bills' (V.4.159). He explicitly signals this exchange from tragedy to comedy: 'What an infinite mock is this' (V.4.188). The response to Posthumus is not to attempt to resolve these oppositions but to be playful with them, parodying their seriousness.

Whereas Posthumus speaks in oppositions as a response to a complex world constructed through protean genres, the more extreme relation of opposition, paradox, rests at the heart of the romance. At the end of the play a living and dead character appears onstage. Seeing Imogen, their Fidele, alive again, Guiderius says 'The same dead thing alive' (V.5.123). Romance resurrects Imogen, just as it does Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Thaisa in *Pericles*, and just as it fails to do in *Othello*, the tragic genre. Motivating Posthumus's paradoxical behaviour, to hurt that which he loves most, is his own error. He mistakes Imogen for a 'scornful page', someone who is mocking him. Even this most tragic moment is expressed through the language of comedy: 'Shall's have a play of this? [...] *He strikes her down*' (V.5.228). 'Play' references playfulness, as if his gesture is a friendly thump. The paradoxes of genre become internalised in the language: it is comic in Posthumus's framing of his hitting her as playful, yet it is tragic in that Posthumus fails to recognise his wife and instead beats her. *Cymbeline* is thus indecorous in its inclusion of many different genres and its refusal to adhere strictly to any of them.

Roger Warren argues that the play is full of extremes, contrasts and paradoxes designed to move the audience. Referring to Posthumus's violence towards Imogen on being reunited, Warren states that 'the more violent he was then, the more overwhelming this moment seems now. Once again, the play's technique of

contrasting extremes is in full operation.’⁵⁵ For Warren, comedy and tragedy are contained together for aesthetic intensification; no claim is made about the oppositional quality of romance that mixes genres or the peculiarity that allows contrasting genres to be contained together. Recognising that the contrast is a method of intensification does not account for the more fundamental role of paradox and its relation to romance. Guiderius’s statement points out that romance encodes a paradox of life, that dead things cannot then be living, the same paradox that occurs in *The Winter’s Tale* with Hermione. This paradox is an organising principle in that it manages to contain two mutually exclusive forms together. It is the structure that attempts to stabilise romance in its oscillation between death and life, and comedy and tragedy. Rosalie Colie describes Renaissance paradox as an arbitrator, that it ‘served to mediate all sorts of ideas and things which, under strict categorical arrangements, do not at first glance appear to “fit”’.⁵⁶ Guiderius’s paradox expresses what does not ‘fit’ together, not just in terms of logical contradiction but also in what is indecorous.

This paradox represents the conflicting genres in the play within romance. This is conceptualised in *MSND* as paradox, where Theseus exclaims ‘Merry and tragical! tedious and brief! | That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow. | How shall we find the concord of this discord?’ (V.1.57-9). In describing the ‘tragical mirth’ of Pyramus and Thisbe, Theseus fails to reconcile the plural generic elements of tragicomedy. Theseus, like Posthumus, struggles to make sense of the generic oppositions that confront him. Yet *Cymbeline* pushes genre even further in the ending of the play. It takes a strange, even scandalous, turn away from romance into

⁵⁵ Warren, ‘Introduction’, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 508.

satire. This is another key feature of Shakespeare's faulty genre, which moves into a completely different generic mode.

3.5.2 Suspicious Words

3.5.2.1 *Ill-fitting Endings*

The first part of this chapter explored how genre determines error across comedy and tragedy. I argue for the sense of romance in *Cymbeline* to be considered as Shakespeare's 'faulty genre', which is erroneous according to early modern ideals of decorum. In part two I claim that the 'faulty genre' is taken to another level, not just in mixing comedy and tragedy in potentially confusing ways, but away from romance, comedy and tragedy, into satire, pushing the play deeper into generic error. Satire can broadly be defined as the use of irony to expose folly, especially in a social or political context.⁵⁷ At the end of the play the King speaks in error by welcoming in the Romans even after defeating them. His final speech is rendered ironic by its contradiction with the middle of the play where he stridently resists the Roman invasion.⁵⁸ *Cymbeline*'s language is hyperbolic and utopian and leads us to suspect the error of its meaning. I argue that his words satirise the ideal of political unity towards which they strive, and via their political allegory, they can potentially deride King James's dream of the unity of Britain. Genre here is crucial, as it is

⁵⁷ See the *OED* entry on satire: 'A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary.' <www.oed.com> [date accessed 8 September 2014]. For a study of satire in the English Renaissance, see Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) especially 'Elizabethan Critical Theories of Satire', pp. 54-63.

⁵⁸ A link between error and irony is captured in the quarto of *3 Henry VI* where 'erroneous' is printed as 'ironious'. Both words are appropriate in this context. A man has just killed another on the battle field and discovers that it is his own son. His error is ironic as the person who gave the man life is also the one to take it away: 'O boy, thy father gave thee life too soon, and hath bereft thee of thy life too late!' (II.5.92-3).

because of our awareness of romance that we can realise the ill-fit of the ending and explore other explanations which leads us to satire.

Satire is, according to M. H. Abrams, ‘the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous’.⁵⁹ In *Cymbeline*, I argue that the conceptualisation of the invasion, war and colonisation by the Romans as a glorious unity is absurd. Patricia Meyer Spacks claims that ‘[s]atire has traditionally had a public function, and its public orientation remains.’⁶⁰ It is this public function that the play’s ending turns towards. The absurdity criticises belief in multi-national unification, a criticism which benefits the citizenry rather than the state. Criticism of Britain is understandable given that the problems James faced in his vision of unification were insurmountable. The two different legal systems were particularly problematic, as were the different forms of citizenship. Scots born after 1603 had the same rights under English law as Englishmen but those born before 1603 did not, established by Calvin’s Case in 1608.⁶¹ Martin Butler argues that, in 1610 ‘it was simply not possible for *Cymbeline* to endorse British union: politically, single nationhood was already dead, and would remain merely an aspiration until the realms were integrated by statute in 1707.’⁶² Butler argues that James’s idea of Britain was a corpse. I would extend this to argue that *Cymbeline*’s symbolisation of it at the end of the play is satirically derisive.

I suggest that the ending of the play can be read as ironic, which is a basis for a satirical message about James and the project of unification. It is not decisive that irony becomes satirical at the end of the play, but it is an interpretative possibility. To

⁵⁹ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed., (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 153

⁶⁰ Patricia Meyer Spacks, ‘Some Reflections on Satire’, in *Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism*, Ronald Paulson ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 360-78, p. 363.

⁶¹ Martin Butler, ‘Introduction’ in *Cymbeline*, ed. Martin Butler, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 1-54, pp. 38-9.

⁶² Butler, ‘Introduction’, p. 39.

Cymbeline, the King of Britain, is joyfully submitting his country's sovereignty to the invading Roman army that he has just defeated. The speech looks askance at the political implications of a King making a possibly foolish decision. This is error politicised: it is not a language game where Shakespeare plays with the literary possibilities of presenting wrong as right. Any anticipation of wrongness or uncertainty is absent from Cymbeline's words. In its utopian tone, any difficulty that would previously have registered as an opposition or tension is resolved in his simple ability to declare peace and union. The style of his language is wildly different from Posthumus's uncertainty in making a decision: 'either both or nothing, | Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such | As sense cannot untie' (V.4.146-8). Whereas Posthumus is full of doubt, Cymbeline suppresses the opposition between right and wrong and consequently speaks in error. He paints invasion as peace, war with Rome as a friendly accord, and colonisation as cessation of violence. Viewing the speech in this way reveals Cymbeline's enthusiasm to be folly, enabling an ironic and even satirical reading of his decision.

Quintero argues that error is one of satire's essential parts. He states, 'in order to be laid bare and satirized, X's "evil act" must be an evil of error, not pure evil, nor can X be hypothetically incorrigible'.⁶⁶ Cymbeline's action here is not necessarily 'evil'; instead it is misguided and inconsistent with his previous position on the Romans. The work of satire is to illuminate the error and present it for possible correction, which would be to place the sovereignty of individual nations above the political expediency of unity. Quintero continues, '[s]atire requires the inclusion, not the exclusion, of human failing'.⁶⁷ Cymbeline is a king in error. His hyperbolic language invokes high-minded symbols, which become clichés. Similarly, the

⁶⁶ Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', p. 2.

⁶⁷ Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', p. 2.

soothsayer speaks of eagles and sunbeams that represent glorious unionisation, images that appear ironic given the bloody conflict with an invading army. The romantic genre is so full of improbable elements, containing a ‘deal of wonder’ (V.2.23-4, *The Winter’s Tale*), that perhaps it is unsurprising that his words are suspicious.

Similar doubts occur in other romantic plays: ‘this news which is called true is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion.’ (V.2.28-9, *The Winter’s Tale*). The ‘old tale’ is tied up with myth, which confounds the search for evidence and ‘proofs’ (V.2.32). Theseus is another doubter of romance, this time of the lovers’ story in *MSND*: ‘More strange than true: I never may believe | These antique fables, nor these fairy toys’ (V.1.2-3). He believes it to be far-fetched and irrational, a ‘trick’ of the imagination (V.1.18). Cymbeline’s final speech exists in a context of fantasy, with prophesies and gods descending. The expectations of fabulous, spectacular romance migrate to Cymbeline’s own happy ending; Britain’s union with Rome is as unbelievable a conclusion as the descent of Jupiter on an eagle.

Shakespeare’s comic endings often retain problematic elements, refusing to deliver complete closure.⁶⁸ For example, in *MSND* Hippolyta’s status remains ambiguous. Theseus claims ‘I woo’d thee with my sword, and won thy love, doing thee injuries’, but we are never given her opinion on their engagement. Whereas it is declared that the lovers will be married and Oberon and Titania go off to the ‘best bride-bed’, Theseus and Hippolyta’s relationship remains uncertain. Another example would be Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* who after being ‘notoriously abused’ exits the play promising ‘I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you’ (V.1.378-9). In

⁶⁸ These endings are more marked in the problem plays, but I argue that they also apply to some of the comedies.

its ease of reconciliation and comfort in closure, *Cymbeline* does not conform to other comic Shakespearean endings. The irresistible force of providence and the overwhelming sense of destiny invoked by the prophecies and their clichéd, ritualistic language is the model of a perfect ending, where there is no remainder. Interpretation could end here, recognising that Shakespeare varies the style of ending. Yet it is the ill-fit of the ending with the middle that challenges interpretation of the play as conforming to a particular generic structure.

In Act III Scene 1 Cymbeline says to Lucius ‘You must know, | Till the injurious Romans did extort | This tribute from us we were free’ (46-8). Cymbeline claims that Britain ‘Becomes a warlike people, whom we reckon ourselves to be’ (III.1.52). They forcefully resisted Julius Caesar’s initial empire which ‘did almost stretch | The sides o’th’ world’ and according to the King, military resistance to invasion remains part of national identity (III.1.50-1). Cymbeline invokes British history and its resistance of the Romans, specifically King Mulmutius who ‘made our laws, | Who was the first of Britain which did put | His brows within a golden crown’ (III.1.58-60). This martial posturing fails to correspond with his precipitous capitulation to the Romans in the final scene. There is a complete reversal in his attitude: first he invokes a sense of native Britishness formed by resistance to the Romans and then speaks of unifying Rome with Britain and happily paying the ‘wonted tribute’ (V.5.462). Cymbeline explains his own inconsistency by blaming his wife, that he was ‘dissuaded by our wicked queen’ (V.4.463). Although the Queen and Cloten argue strongly against paying the ‘Yearly three thousand pounds’ (III.1.9), they do not ‘dissuade’ Cymbeline from an oppositional position. Indeed he only agrees with them, extending their argument in much the same terms. The Queen mythologises Britain’s ancestors by using ‘Caesar’s sword’ as a metonym of Roman

oppression (III.1.31, 55), a phrase that Cymbeline appropriates. The inconsistency within his own character remains puzzling and complicates interpretation of Cymbeline's final speech.

The sense of peaceful unity that is delivered at the end of the play seems too simple. For example, the soothsayer, 'Harmonious', plays a large part in enunciating the peaceful settlement, alongside Cymbeline. His name alone tells us that the conflict between Rome and Britain was already resolved, the outcome settled long before the end of the play which should be the place of actual resolution. Instead, the ending is toothless and there is the sense that the reconciliation was never under threat. For political negotiation to take place there must be the chance of failure. It is a phoney negotiation of power between Cymbeline and Lucius, Britain and Rome. The ending is therefore too easy: 'The vision, | Which I made known to Lucius ere the stroke | Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant | Is full accomplished' (V.5.467-70). The closure of complete accomplishment is suspicious precisely because it is superficial. Owing to the potency of the happy ending it comes to represent the opposite of itself, rendering the end of the play profoundly uneasy.

Critics have frequently found the ending of *Cymbeline* difficult. Because of the 'extraordinary' ending of *Cymbeline*, as Ann Thompson describes it, the play has a long history of adaptation.⁶⁹ In 1759, William Hawkins made considerable changes to the ending, with Cymbeline celebrating victory over Rome and claiming he will ransom his Roman prisoners.⁷⁰ In 1945, George Bernard Shaw states, '*Cymbeline*, though one of the finest of Shakespeare's later plays now on the stage, goes to pieces

⁶⁹ Ann Thompson, 'Cymbeline's Other Endings', in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare*, ed. Jean I. Marsden (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 203-220, p. 209.

⁷⁰ See Thompson, 'Cymbeline's Other Endings', p. 209.

in the last act [sic].'⁷¹ Shaw cuts almost all of Cymbeline's and the Soothsayer's final dialogue, the location of their 'suspicious' words (V.5.435-76). He reduces Shakespeare's florid Roman vision of harmonious unity with Britain to only an aspiration, as Lucius says 'I hope imperial Caesar will reknit his favour with the radiant Cymbeline'.⁷² Shaw's method for dealing with the ill-fit of the ending is to mollify the vision of unity. In reducing the elevated, idealised language which describes the union, Shaw removes the element of excess that leads interpretation to irony.

The presence of irony in the final scene shows the play and its genre to be in error. Irony is another indecorous feature, another element in need of correction, according to Puttenham, for whom irony is a dangerous manner of speech. It is another form of linguistic concealment: 'Ye do likewise dissemble when ye speak in derision or mockery'.⁷³ Peacham cautions against using irony because 'men can not tell how to understand him, or when to believe him'.⁷⁴ This uncertainty of interpretation is present at the end of *Cymbeline*, where it seems uncertain if it is a glorification or derision of unity and empire. The duality of the ending is indeed misleading for the audience because in its 'plainness' it can bear interpretation as a pure romance but in its 'certain doubleness' it has left romance behind. Irony is therefore a kind of abuse of language, belonging firmly in the category of error.

At this point Shakespeare becomes self-conscious, showing an awareness of how the London stages can be co-opted by state power to disseminate ideology: 'Publish we this peace | To all our subjects' (V.5.478-9). Shakespeare, tongue in cheek, has the theatre audience receiving the message, becoming the subjects who

⁷¹ George Bernard Shaw, 'Foreword' to 'Cymbeline Refinished' in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw* (London: Bodley Head, 1974), vol.7 179-86, p. 180.

⁷² Shaw, 'Cymbeline Refinished', (first pub. 1936), p. 199.

⁷³ *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham, p. 272.

⁷⁴ Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, (1577), Sig.G3r, p. 36.

hear the message of ‘peace’, making Shakespeare its publisher. Any interpretation that takes the representation of union at the end of the play as a serious depiction of the union of Britain must then read Shakespeare as an instrument of the state, disseminating James’s suspicious and faulty message of peaceful unionisation. Such a position becomes blind to the censorious way Shakespeare actually uses ‘peace’, taken from the King’s own motto – *beati pacifici* – and its conflictual meaning that he seeks to expose.⁷⁵ *Cymbeline* may be seen as a figure for James, uniting nations, using the terminology of peace to deliver his vision, as James did.⁷⁶

Reading the play in line with the romantic genre insists upon the redemption of the monarchy, as happiness can only come if *Cymbeline*’s final words are themselves purveyors of future happiness. Yet I would argue that irony functions more to resist and radicalise. The conventional perception of authority holding place as the final determiner, of gods as gods and kings as kings, has lulled some critics into perceiving *Cymbeline* as reinforcing this conservative ideology.⁷⁷ This is most apparent when the ending is interpreted as happily hierarchized. Certainty is attenuated into mere ‘appearance’ if paradox and irony are allowed to participate in the reading. An approach that admits these ‘errors’ enables interpretation to include the moments of generic ‘difficulty’, the aspects that challenge genre and conflict with

⁷⁵ The phrase is from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:9). It appeared above his portrait in his *Works of the Most High and Mightie Prince*, (London, 1620)

⁷⁶ A pamphlet entitled *The Peacemaker; or, Great Britain’s Blessing* published anonymously celebrates James as a peacemaker, quoting his own motto and calling him ‘the King of Peace’. *The Peacemaker; or, Great Britain’s Blessing* (London, 1618), Sig.A4r. at EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 21 November 2014]. Originally thought to be written by James himself, it is now considered to be by Thomas Middleton. See Susan Dwyer Amussen, ‘Introduction’ in Thomas Middleton, *Thomas Middleton: the Collected Works* eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavignino (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 1303-6.

⁷⁷ Wickham’s is the most conservative, arguing for the importance of Shakespeare as belonging to the King’s men and emphasising the descent of Jupiter as a masque, a politically conservative, courtly genre that grew in popularity at the beginning of the seventeenth century. See Wickham, ‘From Tragedy to Tragi-comedy: *King Lear* as Prologue’.

pastoral romance, such as Cymbeline's suspiciously happy welcome of the Roman army or Cloten's beheading, a moment of grim violence that remains anomalous.

3.5.2.2. *Political Allegory in Cymbeline*

It has been argued that the message of peace and unification between Britain and Rome in *Cymbeline* allegorises King James VI and I's vision of a Great Britain.⁷⁸

Leah Marcus claims that 'Jove is clearly to be identified with King James I, the creator of Great Britain'.⁷⁹ Marcus reads Jupiter, who descends and deposits a tablet of stone on Posthumus, as King James VI of Scotland, James I of England.⁸⁰ She argues that 'James I more than once descended upon Parliament like Jove with his "thunderbolts" to chide its members for their sluggishness with a pet project of his, the creation of Great Britain through the union of England and Scotland.'⁸¹

Consistent with this view, the stage direction states: '*Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle. He throws a thunderbolt. The ghosts fall on their knees*' (V.4.92 S.D.)⁸² He is wrathful and absolutist, claiming that his power is 'sky-

⁷⁸ Martin Butler argues for the significance of the play's historical context: 'by setting his play in early Britain, Shakespeare ensured that it alluded to a leading motif of James's political culture', that is 'power passing from ancient Troy and Rome to James's new British *imperium*.' Butler, 'Introduction', p. 38. Readings of the play's ideology often focus on its representation of the relationship between Britain and Rome. Garret A. Sullivan suggests that the play's interest in the Roman Empire 'echoes James's ambitions for a united kingdom (or, perhaps, a unified and homogenized landscape of sovereignty)'. Garret A. Sullivan, *Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations on the Early Modern Stage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 157. Amy Scott proposes that 'From James's right to the throne, to England's right to a kingdom and an empire, *Cymbeline* appears to endorse Stuart ideology.' Amy Scott, 'Cymbeline and the Politics/Poetics of Mobility', in *Performing Environments: Site-Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama* eds. Susan Bennett and Mary Polito, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 222.40, p. 225.

⁷⁹ Leah Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', in *Shakespeare: The Last Plays* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 136.

⁸⁰ Amy Scott points out a further historical parallel between Cymbeline and James's policy on Britain: 'Shakespeare likely wrote the play in the wake of the 1610 celebrations in which James I's son Henry was officially created Prince of Wales. These events, primarily in their focus on Britain's naval strengths, reflected James's ambitions: to unite England, Scotland and Wales as Britain and to settle British colonies overseas.' Scott, 'Cymbeline and the Politics/Poetics of Mobility', p. 223.

⁸¹ Marcus, 'The Unease of Topicality', p. 135.

⁸² Although the stage directions appear in the First Folio, the first printed edition of Cymbeline, Warren argues that the stage directions are not entirely authorial but that because of repetitions in

planted' and 'batters all rebelling coasts' (V.4.96). He takes control of the romantic problem, declaring that Posthumus 'shall be lord of Lady Innogen' (V.4.107).

Marcus aligns Jupiter's tablet of stone with James's own textual authorship, comparing Jupiter's descent to the 'series of arresting, even jarring, visitations which impose a relentless textuality upon the flow of events', in parliament and beyond.⁸³ Both Jupiter and James are interruptive forces: just as Jupiter gains control and orders the ending of the play in a divine *coup d'état*, so King James desires to authorise and create a unified nation.

Simon Palfrey cautions against the political allegorising of these forces.⁸⁴ It may be objected, for example, that the 'analogical fit' is too neat. It must be conceded that the Romans are a distinctly foreign power seeking an economic contract with Cymbeline, whereas James' project for Britain involved full political unification, but such discrepancies should not obscure the broader parallel between *Cymbeline* and James' unionism. I would argue that political allegory is coherent, given two factors: the first being within the play, the second external to it. As already discussed, the first is the fact that the King's exaggerated and ideal terminology is a clue that it possesses an ironic meaning. The second is the level of political upheaval and uncertainty around the union of Britain, begun by King James at the beginning of the seventeenth century, which informs interpretation of the play.⁸⁵ The main theme of the play's ending is political union, a crossover too precise to be labelled as one of allegory's 'rough coincidences'.⁸⁶ To defend political allegory is not, however, to

punctuation, style and spelling, they are the work of the scribe Ralph Crane 'who annotated and perhaps modified' them. See *Cymbeline*, ed. Roger Warren, pp. 72-3.

⁸³ Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', p. 137.

⁸⁴ Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ This was argued over in parliament for five years from 1603 before being rejected.

⁸⁶ Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare*, p. 7. Yet despite jettisoning allegory, Palfrey invokes it: 'In *Cymbeline*'s Welsh scene, Shakespeare contents himself with an exploration of distinctively British origins: the audience look at the mountaineers as if at their own evolving selves, growing from pagan primitivism to an imminence just ahead of the Jacobean moment.' Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare*, p. 126.

argue for a direct relation between contemporary and textual worlds; allegory may not always be precise, and not every element in a political allegory may correspond to political reality.

Critics have argued that the ending of the play is a political allegory but not an ironic one. Glynne Wickham sees *Cymbeline* as reproducing James's vision of Britain.⁸⁷ He argues that the act of union was miraculous because it prevented foreign invasion. The 'British peoples' were 'saved from foreign invasion and civil war by the peaceful accession of James I in 1603, by the timely discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, and the final ratification of the Union of the two Crowns by Act of Parliament in 1608. That these events were received, at least in London, as little short of miraculous is historically beyond dispute'.⁸⁸ He claims that James's self-fashioned 'messianic', unifying figure led to the generic development from revenge tragedy to tragi-comedy, implying that *Cymbeline* endorses James's rule as an improvement.⁸⁹ In simple terms, revenge tragedy reflected a murderous, tumultuous political climate whereas tragi-comedy reflected a more harmonious society because of the Stuart succession. For Wickham, the romance genre discourages a reading of the play as politically subversive and instead captures the sense of an idyllic future, now possible since the King has put all aright.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ See also David M. Bergeron, 'Shakespeare's Last Roman Play', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 1980), 31-41. Bergeron traces Shakespeare's relation with Rome in *Cymbeline*, arguing that 'the heart of the play is its historical basis'. (p. 32). By making the Roman element in *Cymbeline* one only of textuality Bergeron excludes the question of political parallel which makes England Rome and early modern Scotland, Wales and Ireland part of its empire. What is Shakespeare saying about the union when it is placed contiguously with colonial takeover, especially one that is invited by the King after they have defeated the Romans? Indeed, Bergeron himself notices the contemporary political analogue: 'in writing *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare hit upon an ingenious artistic strategy for uniting ancient Rome and ancient Britain', yet he fails to comment further on the potential of this parallel to extend to the contentious idea of early modern Britain. (p. 33). Instead I would argue that Shakespeare made reference to a former empire implicitly to pass comment on the idea of a future one.

⁸⁸ Wickham, 'From Tragedy to Tragi-comedy: *King Lear* as Prologue', p. 36.

⁸⁹ Wickham, 'From Tragedy to Tragi-comedy: *King Lear* as Prologue', p. 38.

⁹⁰ In this sense, it cannot be further from the political allegory that Marcus discusses which is critical, almost antagonistic towards monarchy.

The language King James VI and I used to describe the union coheres with Wickham's reading of *Cymbeline*. In his speech to Parliament in 1604, as he attempts to convince his members that union is natural and desirable, James declared '[f]or, even as little Brooks lose their Names by their running and Fall into great Rivers, and the very Name and Memory of the great Rivers swallowed up in the Ocean; so, by the Conjunction of divers little Kingdoms in One, are all these private Differences and Questions swallowed up'.⁹¹ James compares nations to streams that naturally flow into one another, obscuring conflict as a larger dominant force contains another.⁹² He speaks in the language of empire and colonial occupation, where the differences between regions, areas or peoples that are in some ways distinct are effaced by subsumption into a larger and more dominant whole. Willy Maley argues that the union marks the ceding of English identity to British, which is nevertheless Anglo-centric. He states that, '[a]s England receded, Britain was heralded as an outgrowth of an originary Englishness, as though the non-English nations of the flowering British state were branches of an English family tree.'⁹³ King James's vision of union is less one of peaceful joining, as elsewhere he suggests in his speech, and more a great English imperial swallowing.

For Miola, political unease in *Cymbeline* is subsumed into the theme of union. This might be interpreted in two senses: union as the legislative Act of Union as well as the broader theme of unity in the play. Miola is explicit in his straightforward reading of the end of the play: 'The siege and invasion motif, appearing here on both the sexual and national levels, articulates no vision of

⁹¹ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 1: 22 March 1604', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 1: 1547-1629* (1802), pp. 142-149. <www.british-history.ac.uk>, [accessed 17 March 2014].

⁹² Willy Maley argues that writers framed the expansion of James's empire through 'metaphors of natural growth'. Willy Maley, *Nation, State, and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 38.

⁹³ Maley, *Nation, State, and Empire in English Renaissance Literature*, p. 38.

impious violation. Instead, it leads to a scene of toleration and forgiveness'.⁹⁴ He argues that Lucius's 'presence there symbolizes the greater harmony now existing between nations... The grand conclusion of *Cymbeline*, then, reconciles the warring factions of the larger, extended Trojan family and thus creates the blessed peace that descends upon all, Briton and Roman alike.'⁹⁵ His reading of this 'peace' ignores the context of the political violence of unionisation and King James's own dubious use of it in his motto. Yet satire prevents such closure. Quintero states that satire, 'unlike tragedy and comedy, stops short of any reconciliation with its subject...it leaves its subject refracted and disharmonized.'⁹⁶ For *Cymbeline*, a satirical interpretation disharmonises the ending, working in the opposite direction to romance which seeks to reconcile.

3.5.2.2.2 Postcolonial Shakespeare

A recent strand of criticism has emphasised the postcolonial elements in *Cymbeline*. Maley argues that '[a]n anti-imperialist, anti-Roman Englishness yields to an imperial Britishness that emulates, even as it opposes, its former tyrant.'⁹⁷ More recently, Tom Nairn has argued that nationalism is an effect of capitalism whereas Maley is arguing that empire is the product of invasion.⁹⁸ In *Cymbeline* it is different again: Rome's failed invasion leads to the absorption of Britain into the Roman Empire in an act of what Nairn calls 'self-colonisation'.

⁹⁴ Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 233.

⁹⁵ Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 233.

⁹⁶ Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', p. 5.

⁹⁷ Maley, 'Postcolonial Shakespeare', p. 147.

⁹⁸ Tom Nairn, *The Breakup of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1981), p. 116. Palfrey also finds the ending of the play to be a troubled nationalistic vision of British union. The 'happy' ending 'is the "Jouiall face"—a reflexive mix of terror, merriment, fecklessness, and dislocation—which remains the floating signifier of Britain's dilated, dilatory authority.' Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare*, p. 250.

Nairn argues that in the twentieth century, neo-colonialism manifests as ‘self-colonialism’: ‘[u]nder the title of “indirect rule”, this abject posture was rather well known to British and other imperialists of the preceding age. Polyvalent dominance [...] is most effective when the suborned have chosen their prostration. And normally, such elective subjection is founded on apparently sensible (if short-range) economic or career reasons: myopia re-attired as the national interest.’⁹⁹ This concept of ‘self-colonialism’ is applicable to *Cymbeline*, as the King of Britain prostrates his state to the invading Roman army. The King’s decision can be seen as an autonomous choice given that the British army defeated the Roman, making such subjugation unnecessary. Cymbeline is the ‘myopic’ king, willing to subject his nations to the ‘polyvalent dominance’ of union with Rome, and allegorically, the Union of Scotland with England, Ireland and Wales. Cymbeline and Harmonious’s references to ‘peace’ claim to be in the ‘national interest’, in the name of circumventing battle with each other or making themselves vulnerable to foreign attack. Similarly, James’ project of unification was partly motivated by the need to resist invasion by countries seeking to install a Roman Catholic leader.

The idea of self-colonialism invites a modulation away from romance at the end of the play by satirising Cymbeline’s declared happy ending with the ‘peace’ sealed with ‘feasts’. Self-colonialism suggests occupation rather than unification, preparing Cymbeline’s spin to be falsified by future reality. Nairn claims that present-day Britain is overly familiar with the ‘abject posture’ of self-colonialism. Cymbeline leaves us with an image of national capitulation on behalf of the King and a faulty sense of peace, both of which presage the bumpy road to British

⁹⁹ Tom Nairn, *The Breakup of Britain*, p. xxi.

Unionism.¹⁰⁰ As Martin Butler emphasises ‘royal attempts to promote integration by unifying elements of the English and Scots constitutions quickly ran into parliamentary sand.’¹⁰¹ A postcolonial reading provides further support for the idea that the political allegory at the end of the play can be read as satirical.

3.5.3 Conclusion

If *Cymbeline* is a romantic comedy it should end with the reuniting of the family in the final scene as other comedies do, with Imogen and Posthumus together, Guiderius and Arviragus revealed to be the King’s sons, Pisano filling in the gaps of the story, Iachimo confessing himself, and a sense of forgiveness spreading as Cymbeline declares ‘Pardon’s the word to all’ (V.5.422). The dialogue between the family corrects their ‘error’ and ‘accident’ as the loose narratives are gathered in, demonstrated by Guiderius’s self-conscious request to ‘let me end the story’ (V.5.287). This signals the end of the romance, as Cymbeline calls for the company to ‘quit this ground, | and smoke the temple with our sacrifices’ (V.5.397-8). This is the first time he calls for feasts and thanksgivings in the temple but it is not the last. Instead the play transgresses the local ending, demonstrating Shakespeare’s faulty genre, which is erratic and insists on continuing the action. His ‘faultiness’ is a deviation from the simpler solution of resting with the family reunited, as the genre

¹⁰⁰ In 1604 the English parliament debated the union, hostility to it was made clear and it was rejected. See Stephen G. Ellis, *The Making of the British Isles: The State of Britain and Ireland, 1450-1660* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 290. The idea of national unionism has been termed the ‘British problem’. According to Willy Maley, ‘[t]he historiography of the “British Problem”, also known as Archipelagic history, three kingdoms history, and the new British history, identified a crisis of multiple monarchy in the 1630s and 1640s which precipitated what was hitherto known as the ‘English Revolution’ or ‘English Civil War’. Willy Maley, *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 2. See also Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History* (London: Routledge, 1995); Steven Ellis and Sarah Barber, eds., *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485–1725* (London: Longman, 1995); Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts, eds., *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Butler, ‘Introduction’, p. 39.

takes a political and satirical turn by ending with the political question of the Romans. He declares a departure to the temple for a second time, that 'in the temple of great Jupiter our peace we'll ratify; seal it with feasts' (V.5.483). This time it is to celebrate political rather than familial unity and forms a second ending.

Our awareness of the generic cues of romance makes satire possible because those expectations are confounded. Genre sets up a misreading that the audience can interpretatively 'correct' by finding another approach. The error of the final moments can be sensed and the audience can seek an alternative explanation – that which is ironic or satirical. In arguing for Shakespeare's faulty genre, which mixes and clashes modes, doubling or eliding cues for interpretation, this chapter argues against critical readings that perceive genre only as a means of categorisation and so must suppress the play's striking turn away from romance. Such an assumption excludes competing genres or modes of reading such as irony and satire, which return us from the escapism of romance to political truth. The final moments of the play operate in two modes, in tension with each other: one undercuts the pastoral dream of a peaceful future while the other banishes the potential of state-led violence. The paradox of genre is that, read as romance, the ending of *Cymbeline* endorses the domination of one country over another as peaceful and prosperous, yet read ironically this is satirised, suggesting that national domination could well be oppressive, unsettled and violent.

Thus, in some ways error is the only certainty, that the words at the end of the play are not straight but mistaken. The multiple possibilities of what else they may signify through irony or satire is uncertain, since error or misreading prompts rereading. We are given a sense of wandering, multiple genres which reduce the ability to offer definitive interpretation. There is not, however, a problem of selecting

the ‘right’ reading from the possible ‘substitutions’ or readings: there is no ‘substitute of most allowed sufficiency’, as the Duke claims in *Othello* (I.3.224). Instead the audience is faced with the difficulty of selecting an appropriate reading in response to an indecorous text. Romance, comedy, tragedy, political allegory, and irony do not ‘fit’ sufficiently or completely, compelling us to wander on to the next interpretative frame. But finally, satire may well prove to be a kind of necessary corrective. According to Abrams, satire is often ‘a corrective of human vice and folly’.¹⁰² From this perspective, satire would seek to expose and correct Cymbeline’s folly in believing in the virtue and benefit of union with Rome. Through the erroneous irony of Cymbeline’s closing words, the error of his belief is designated for emendation. The satirical ‘corrective’ may well extend to King James’s belief in the virtue of British union, but such correction was, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as dangerous as it was uncertain.

¹⁰² Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 154.

Conclusion

In the early modern period, the meaning of ‘error’ included ‘wandering’ as well as ‘mistake’. This enabled it to resist associations of wrongness, badness and the need for correction. This thesis demonstrates that Shakespeare creatively employs the sense of error as wandering in his drama, in plots that wander and turn, in characters that lose and find themselves, and in language that wanders away from the literal to the figurative. Yet I show that this kind of error has been and remains subject to correction, in the meanderings of the material text (chapter three), or in critical interpretation that seeks to standardize a play by reading it as conforming to genre conventions rather than resisting them (chapter five). I have argued that this justifies reconceptualising the place of ‘error’ in Shakespeare’s drama.

One of the main implications of this research is that ‘error’ is not always a distorting influence to be excised, as some editorial practices implicitly assume, but is rather an important aspect of a play, character, or material text. This is not to argue that every ‘error’ has equal value. Certain errors do in fact require correction without having significant implications for the meaning and interpretation of a text. Yet where error is used creatively or politically, as it often is in Shakespeare, it should be constructively incorporated into an understanding of a play’s theme, structure and language.

Historically, Shakespearean error has been subject to amendment as a kind of censorship. Error has not been an easy category to reconcile with the requirements of the project of canonisation. In the First Folio, John Heminge and Henry Condell mythologise Shakespeare’s writing style by suppressing error. They claim that ‘His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness,

that we have scarcely received from him a blot in his papers.’¹ Heminge and Condell attempt to suppress Shakespearean error because it represents the non-standard, wrong, or deviant, which does not cohere with their ideal of literary perfection, of words flowing with a natural ‘easiness’. This underscores a vision of error-averse Shakespeare, one that this thesis reassesses by examining the various meanings of error.

Error can become a political category through its representation of marginalisation, non-conformity and abnormality. Shakespeare uses error not only as an aide for creativity but persistently draws attention to subjects who, in one way or another, are in ‘error’, to challenge their exclusion. Consequently, the politics of error is a significant part of this research. The first section, erroneous vessels, examined the definition of certain social groups through their errors, such as women (chapter one) or foreigners (chapter two). The second and third sections focused more specifically on Shakespearean use of error in different parts of a literary text, in terms of wandering characters (chapter three), wandering language (chapter four), and faulty genre (chapter five). The politics of error, which frequently devalues the object with which it is associated, was pursued in these two sections through an examination of textual criticism and misreading texts (chapter three), and the perception of a character’s language as ‘erroneous’ because of class expectations (chapter four). Finally, chapter five argued for Shakespeare’s participation in the politics of national unity, that his erroneous use of genre enables criticism of the idea of national unification.

This thesis not only seeks to understand how error functions in early modern texts, but can also be seen as a defence of the erroneous people of Cawdrey’s

¹ John Heminge and Henry Condell, ‘To the Great Variety of Readers’, in *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies Histories and Tragedies* (London, 1623), Sig. A3.

‘Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull perfons’, who require correction or at least careful instruction.² By defending error I am also defending those to whom it attaches: the victims of gender and class. For example, the ‘mechanicals’ from *MSND* are working men who are the victims of the running joke about their ignorance and misunderstandings (see chapter four). When they put on a tragedy they are mocked by Theseus, excluded from his educated, courtly culture. Or they are women characters like Cressida, who senses her own inadequacy when speaking as a woman, or Mistress Quickly who is mocked for her faulty language (see chapter one).

If error is a political category that applies to certain groups of people, Philip the Bastard is Shakespeare’s figure of error. He is the embodiment of the wrong turn, the product of a wandering eye, the stubborn proof that resists the pure line of Kings, in which he himself has a misplaced faith.³ Edmund’s ‘stand up for bastards’ speech is Shakespeare defending this type of erroneous figure and giving error a voice:

Why bastard? wherefore base?
 When my dimensions are as well compact,
 My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
 As honest madam’s issue? Why brand they us
 With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
 More composition and fierce quality
 Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
 Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
 Got ‘tween asleep and wake? Well, then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
 Our father’s love is to the bastard Edmund
 As to the legitimate: fine word,—legitimate!
 Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
 And my invention thrive, Edmund the base

² Discussed p. 5. Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical* (London: 1604), at *EEBO*, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 April 2014]. Mazzio takes a similar approach, arguing that humanist ideals of persuasion and Reformation ideals of plain speech led to ‘historical amnesia about particular persons, communities, and linguistic forms coded as unintelligible or ineffectual.’ Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, p. 2.

³ See 1.1.1.3 for a discussion of Philip the Bastard.

Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Edmund claims that the social consequence of adherence to rectitude is the creation of ‘a whole tribe of fops’. Following the straight path generates only insignificant fools. These ‘fops’ are lifeless, characterless people without extremity. They are reproduced, standardized in their ‘tribe’ and because of their similarity they are replicable. This speech opposes an ideology of standardisation which pursues cultural and social homogeneity. Such a ‘tribe’ will resemble the characteristics of the bed in which it is conceived: ‘dull, stale, tired’. In contrast, Edmund emphasises his exceptionality. He questions his low status by turning his difference to his advantage, ‘difference’ here meaning an abstraction used to denote marginality, as discussed by Valerie Wayne.⁴ Shakespeare pressurises the word ‘legitimate’, by praising error. He questions the degradation of bastardy and in so doing challenges the benefit of rectitude in combination with standardization. Edmund’s declaration ‘I grow; I prosper’ is the proliferation of error, prompting the anxiety that the ‘wrong’ may succeed the ‘right’ and ‘top the legitimate’, reversing the social order. Thus, praising error is a political action.

Whereas this thesis has mainly focused on Shakespearean error, an alternative perspective on error in a wider Renaissance context would be a fruitful topic of future research. The idea of error as ineradicable but useful in Shakespeare is in conflict with a wider historical perspective on error. In Reformation discourse, error becomes an accusation rather than an aid to creativity.⁵ An approach to error from a

⁴ Valerie Wayne, ‘Introduction’, *The Matter of Difference*, ed. Valerie Wayne, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 1. Wayne is referring specifically to the marginality of women but her category of ‘difference’ can usefully apply to other types of marginalisation, such as Edmund’s status as a bastard.

⁵ Preliminary reading includes Antoinina Bevan Zlatar, *Reformation Fictions: Polemical Protestant Dialogues in Elizabethan England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark Greengrass, *The Longman Companion to the European Reformation, c. 1500-1618* (London:

sixteenth-century religious perspective may envisage the salvation of the text, the correcting of its wrongs and corruptions, which delivers a more secure sense of moral and theological virtue. This present thesis could be extended by an investigation into the impact of the Reformation on the identification, representation and treatment of error. This could involve bringing together the two conflicting positions on error, according to which it is on the one hand creative and on the other sinful.

This thesis defines Shakespearean error as a literary invitation, a crucial plot feature, a metaphorical structure and a gendered stigma. I argue that error has manifold values beyond simple plot-and-character advancement. To understand these values is to conceive of the fundamental place of error in constructing a sixteenth-century idea of national identity, to recognise its gender and class inflections and the ideology that exploits error to maintain the coherency of these categories. This thesis agrees with Cave who argues that error is central to Renaissance literature: '[e]rror is a property of all discursive language; the problems of writing (and of reading) can never be solved.'⁶ Error is a resource for literature as well as a problem, and in Shakespeare it is employed as both.

Longman, 1998). Rigolot argues that 'Dans une culture dominée par une orthodoxie vouée à la correction des erreurs doctrinales, le rêve humaniste d'une *varietas* et d'une *festivitas* infinies était sans doute impossible.' My translation: 'In a culture dominated by an orthodoxy devoted to the correction of doctrinal errors, the humanistic dream of infinite *varietas* and *festivitas* was undoubtedly impossible.' Rigolot, *L'Erreur de la Renaissance*, p. 32. There is, therefore, a clash between the artistic aspect of error I have been examining in Shakespeare and the doctrinal aspect in the religious context.

⁶ Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*, p. xxii.

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